

# GOD'S VISION FOR HIS PEOPLE

Acts 1:1-26

Key Verse: 1:8

**“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”**

Over the next 4 weeks we are going to study select passages from the book of Acts with the overarching theme of God's vision for his people. So, why do we need to have God's vision? Without God's vision, we can only cling onto human dreams. However, human dreams are fleeting and cannot satisfy. On the other hand, God's vision comes from the eternal, infinite God. It is ever expanding and leads us to an eternal purpose in God. Many of us here have glimpsed God's vision at times. But in the course of time, we find that vision clouded and uncertain. We need to renew God's vision in our minds and hearts. May God plant his vision in our hearts as we listen to his words. We will study Acts 1 in two parts. In verses 1-9, Jesus mainly talked about the kingdom of God and what would happen to the disciples when the Holy Spirit came on them. Most significantly, they would be Jesus' witnesses to the ends of the earth. In verses 10-26, we learned how the disciples prepared to receive the Holy Spirit through joining constantly in prayer.

## **I. You will be my witnesses (1-9)**

Let's look at verses 1-2. **“In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.”** The author, Luke, writes this book as a sequel to his Gospel. His Gospel spoke about the actions and teachings of Jesus up until he ascended into heaven. The book of Acts begins where the Gospel of Luke left off.

Look at verse 3. **“After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.”** Jesus had suffered and died. It was a time of vulnerability for the apostles due to the strong power of fear and death. They needed clear faith in the resurrection. Therefore, Jesus presented himself to them. He painstakingly gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. Even when Thomas adamantly refused to accept the resurrection, Jesus came to him and allowed him to touch the nail marks in his hands and put his hand

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into his side (Jn 20:27). Jesus wanted them to convince them that beyond a shadow of a doubt he was alive. In this way, they could have victory over the fear of death and have the kingdom of God in them.

With this Jesus began a forty day sermon about the kingdom of God. One day, he spoke about God's reign. Another day, he spoke about the beautiful wedding ceremony. Still on another day, he spoke about how there isn't a hospital since there is no sickness, death, or loss. On other days, there were messages on love, joy, peace, justice. For forty days, he spoke about the greatness of the kingdom of God. Maybe during that time the apostles felt like they were in the kingdom of God. But the kingdom of God is not just a place. We can begin to experience it now. Very soon, there will be a CIS conference in Moscow entitled God's Kingdom. As we know, this will happen in the midst of much turmoil in that region. It may not be a forty day conference on the kingdom of God, but we can pray that during those few days the kingdom of God may come while people listen to the word of God. It may be like the kingdom of God.

Look at verses 4-5. **“On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: ‘Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’”** Now here, Jesus told them to wait. And as the saying goes, “The waiting is the hardest part.” But what was even harder was that Jesus commanded them not to leave Jerusalem. Jerusalem! That is the very last place where the apostles would want to be. That is where the Pharisees were. That is where they failed miserably. They would rather get out of there as fast as they can. However, they needed to do God's work starting in Jerusalem. So, they should overcome fear for the sake of God's work. They needed to be baptized by the Holy Spirit. The word baptize refers to a transformation from the old to the new. When one is baptized with water, as in the case of John's baptism, one makes a decision to rid himself of the old life and live a new life in God. But this baptism cannot cleanse us from sin. It cannot fully transform us. However, the baptism of the Holy Spirit transforms a sinful person to be a child of God. Therefore, in order to do the work of God, the apostles needed this life altering transformation which could only come through the baptism of the Holy Spirit. It wasn't something they would earn like a merit raise. It was a gift and they needed to wait for it. Now, to make it clear, waiting doesn't mean to do nothing. As we will see later, it means to prepare ourselves through prayer and listening to God's word. Here, we can learn that the work of God begins in our own hearts first. Only when we are changed, then we can be useful to God for his great purpose.

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How did the apostle respond? Did they say, "Amen!"? No. It says that they gathered around him and asked him, "**Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?**" The apostles seemed to gather around Jesus with one heart and mind. They seemed to be really excited about this. And through their question, we can see what is really in their hearts. It was their dream of a restored Israel. But before we nitpick and look down on their response with self-righteous indignation, let's remember that we are all very much like them. Actually, to have human dreams isn't inherently sinful or bad. We all, for the most part, want to get married and have children and get a high paying job or accomplish something great in our lifetimes. We call this the American dream. Ultimately, the apostles wanted freedom from oppressors. They wanted to restore David's kingdom which reveals God's glory to the whole world. So, the apostles' dream was actually nobler than that of the American dream. So, dreams are not bad. However, the problem comes about when our human dream subverts God's great vision for us. The apostles did not have any idea about God's vision to restore the kingdom of God in people's hearts which would actually unite all people of all nations. So, Jesus wanted to help them have God's vision.

In verse 7 he says, "**It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.**" They did not need to worry about the times and dates. Instead, they just needed to trust God and what God is doing. They needed to be aligned with what God wanted.

Let's read verse 8, our key verse. "**But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.**" Did you hear what Jesus said? He said that, "**... you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you...**" God's vision involves us; it involves sinners who are saved by the grace of Jesus Christ and have their hope in the kingdom of God. God wants to use each of us in for his purpose. However, it is no small task. Honestly, the disciples were too weak to be able to carry out God's vision to change the whole world. But it is not about us and our strength. We cannot accomplish God's vision by human means. We need God's divine power and wisdom to do it. So, Jesus trusted that when they received the Holy Spirit then they could carry out God's vision. When the apostles were fearful, the Holy Spirit would make them courageous. When they were weak, the Holy Spirit would make them strong. When they did not have the words to speak, the Holy Spirit would fill their hearts, minds and mouths with God's powerful word.

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God's vision for them was that they would be Jesus' witnesses. Now, a witness is someone who testifies to the truth about what he had experienced. So, as Jesus' witnesses, they would testify about him: his life and his teachings. They would also speak about how much grace they experienced in their own lives through Jesus. Matthew would go on to tell how much Jesus loved a selfish sinner like him when no one else would. Peter would confess that he was a failure in following Jesus and yet Jesus would go on to unconditionally love him and restore him. But most importantly, they would testify to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is that message that would bring salvation to souls and bring about the kingdom of God in people's hearts. However, to be a witness of Jesus, especially at that time, almost meant having a death sentence. In fact, the Greek word for witness also means martyr. There are nations in this world today that if you confess about Christ, you will be killed. God's vision was costly but very valuable. Jesus said, **"For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it"** (Mk 8:35).

The apostles would be Jesus' witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. This gospel message is worldwide. It expands to all nations and goes from generation to generation. God's concern and vision is for the kingdom of God to be restored in the hearts of all people through accepting the gospel message. God's vision was that the gospel would expand to every corner of the globe in their generation. And they went to the ends of the earth as witnesses of Jesus Christ.

In the book of Genesis, we meet Abraham. He was childless and for a man in that culture, not having children was very shameful. So, he dreamed that he would have a child one day. God called him with the promise that he would be a great nation and a blessing. And yet, there was no son on the way. And he began to blame God, "Where is my son?!" God said, **"Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them."** Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." God's vision was far greater than Abraham's desire for a son. Abraham accepted it by faith. In due time, God granted him a miraculous son. But Abraham was willing to offer him back to God, because he had in mind God's great vision for his life. God would use him to be a father of many nation, one of which was God's promised people. And through his line came the Messiah, Jesus Christ (Mt 1:1).

In the early days of UBF history, there were some Korean women who were on their way to Germany to work there as nurses. At that time, Dr. Lee had God's vision to use this opportunity to send out missionaries in accordance with the world

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mission command. So, he hurried to the airport and earnestly tried to convince them to stay in Korea a little while longer to receive missionary training. Through the help the Holy Spirit, they decided to stay and get trained. After just a few weeks of training, they went to Germany as missionaries. Through the help of the Holy Spirit, they had vision to bring the gospel to Germany. So, instead of just going there to make money, they were used for gospel work. This summer, there will be a European Summer Bible Conference hosted by German coworkers. God's vision was realized when they decided to live in accordance to it.

Msn Hannah Shin was a missionary who went with her husband to the Czech Republic. When her husband went to be with the Lord about 12 years ago, what was she going to do. She had a young son to take care of and a business to manage, not to mention doing the work of God. She could of given up on serving the ministry and go back to Korea. But she had God's vision and stayed, serving God's ministry. Not only is she a blessing to the Czech people, but her business is thriving and her son has been raised as a coworker to serve the ministry. Recently, she has been hosting CBF conference for the children of European coworkers. When she had God's vision, she can be used greatly by God.

Without God's vision, we can only focus on our human dreams. As a growing shepherd, through an Acts 2 message, I had a vision to be an International Bible messenger in ten years. That was over ten years ago. At that time, I was single and a student. I did not have much. But I had vision. Then God blessed me to graduate, get married, and have a cute little son, Barnabas. But in the course of bearing all these blessings, God's vision became a little bit dim. When I married, the title of the wedding address was, "A Family with God's Vision." How often was I encouraged to find his purpose and vision for me?! Throughout the past year, God has used me, along with two others, to serve the 7 am Sunday Worship Service message. It looks small. But God's great vision is there. Through the Holy Spirit's help, God can use this sinner to do his amazing work according to his vision. I pray that through the help of the Holy Spirit, God's great vision may be restored and I can be used to carry it out. My wife has a vision to be an encouragement to chapters through North America by writing to them. She found that she has a gift to write and to encourage. May God bless this ministry of encouragement for God's great vision.

According to verse 9, after he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. In leaving, Jesus took his rightful place as King of kings and Lord of lords. At the same time, from there he would send out the gift of the Holy Spirit to help the apostles. Therefore, when he ascended,

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he fully entrusted to us the work of world salvation. So, what is in your heart? Just human dreams? Or do you have God's vision to be a witness of Jesus to the ends of the earth! May God bless us to have God's vision.

## II. They all joined together constantly in prayer (10-26)

Jesus had just given them God's world mission vision. And then he ascended into heaven. The disciples were just left standing there, mouths open and eyes looking intently into heaven... "Jesus, come back. What are we going to do?" Then suddenly, two men in white stood beside them and rebuked them. **"Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."** It meant that it was time for them to do what Jesus told them to do. Jesus will come back one day with glory and power. Yet, until then, we have something to do.

How were they going to be able to carry out such a grand plan? They needed to first wait in Jerusalem for the power of the Holy Spirit. So, they returned to Jerusalem and went upstairs to the room in which they were staying. The apostles were there; the women were there. And they waited. This period of waiting was about 10 days long. And during this 10 day period, what did they do as they waited and prepared for the Holy Spirit's coming? Verse 14 says, "They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers." They prayed two by two and 120 by 120. Men prayed and women prayed. They prayed crying out constantly that God would send his Spirit and use them for his vision. They were not separated, but joined their hearts together under God's great vision.

Meanwhile, during prayer, Peter realized that the issue of Judas' betrayal had left a gaping wound in the vessel of believers. Misunderstandings could have arisen and members might have begun to doubt the sincerity of one another. They might even have begun to doubt their own sincerity. But through the study of Scripture, Peter could see Judas' betrayal from God's point of view. And so, they prayed and Matthias was chosen to replace his place of leadership.

Though they were completely clueless in what to do, through united prayer, God led them to prepare for the coming of the Holy Spirit. Through prayer, they could repair the spiritual vessel with wisdom. We need to pray. We need to pray for the European and CIS Summer Bible Conferences coming up. Whether or not we are going to one of these conferences, let's pray that we can have God's vision

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for world salvation. Let's pray for the upcoming school year and that we may be his witnesses on the campus. May God bless us with his vision.