**The Unstoppable Promise**

Acts 1:4-8

We saw last week that **Luke’s purpose** in writing both his gospel and Acts, the sequel, ***was to give believers CERTAINTY***.

**Clarity about Jesus provides Certainty about the Gospel**

“It seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ***that you may have certainty*** concerning the things you have been taught.” Luke 1:3-4

***If you are uncertain about going to heaven***, if you are not sure about your eternity, if you don’t have assurance in your relationship with God, it is because you lack clarity about Jesus and what He accomplished for us. CLARITY about Jesus provides CERTAINTY about the Gospel. Last week we were reminded:

**Clarity about Jesus provides Certainty about the Gospel**

* Jesus was the ultimate Prophet
* Jesus was the ultimate Priest
* Jesus is the ultimate King

**As a Prophet** Jesus not only spoke the Word of God, He WAS the Word of God in the flesh. **As a Priest**, Jesus not only presented offerings of worship to His Father, He WAS the full and final sacrifice for sinners like you and me. **As the King of Kings**, Jesus conquered the primary enemies of God’s people when He defeated sin and death forever through His death and resurrection.

When you know the truth about Jesus - when you are CLEAR about who He was - it gives you ***CERTAINTY*** about what He accomplished. Jesus is the All sufficient Savior and the All glorious Lord. We can trust Him completely. We don’t have to wonder if His sacrifice was enough to cover our sins - we KNOW that it was. You don’t have to struggle with doubts about the love and grace of God - God loves you completely and His grace is fully sufficient for you and for me. CERTAINTY. Jesus is our firm foundation. Nothing can shake us.

Today we will study our theme verse for the whole series - Acts 1:8. If you don’t have it memorized yet, hopefully you will by the end of this month!

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and ***you will be my witnesses*** in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Acts 1:8

Jesus spoke these words to the 11 apostles before ascending into heaven. This was a powerful and ***unshakeable PROMISE***. YOU WILL BE my witnesses. You will be called to testify to what you have seen and heard - and you will. It will start right here in Jerusalem but it will not stop here. This good news will spread throughout Judea, even through Samaria and to the end of the earth. All nations - every people group on earth - will hear this good news! “The glory of the Lord will fill the earth as the waters fill the sea!”

And that is precisely how the book of Acts progresses.

**The Promise Fulfilled**

* Acts 1-7 - Jerusalem
* Acts 8-12 - Judea and Samaria
* Acts 13-28 - the end of the earth

In chapters 1-7 we see the Gospel taking root in Jerusalem. In chapters 8-12 it spreads throughout Judea and Samaria, even to GENTILES! And then in chapters 13 to the end the good news of Jesus reaches the end of the known world in those days - the center and heart of the Roman Empire!

Brothers and sisters, ***we are still witnessing the fulfillment of this promise TODAY***. The book of Acts really does not have an ending. You don’t finish Acts 28 and see the words, “The End,” but rather the words, **“To be continued…”**

Today as we continue in Acts 1 we will see three **Unstoppable Kingdom Realities**.

**Three Unstoppable Kingdom Realities**

1. God’s Plan
2. God’s Power
3. God’s Promise

We have called this series **UNSTOPPABLE** - the Church on Mission. And we will see that The Church is unstoppable. Our mission cannot fail. But you and I are not unstoppable. GOD is unstoppable. His plan, His power, His purpose, His promise - those are the unstoppable realities. You and I can easily be sidetracked, derailed, discouraged, made fruitless. But as we align ourselves with God’s plan, as we walk in His power and as we pursue the fulfillment of His promise - then we contribute to the unstoppable mission of the church and then WE ARE unstoppable. Knowing these kingdom realities and TRUSTING in them ***should give us great BOLDNESS!*** Nothing can stop us on this mission!

Think of yourself as a **100 pound freshman running back**. As you look at the defensive linemen, linebackers and even the secondary you know any one of them could squash you flat. But imagine on your high school team that you had the best NFL offensive line and the best full back in the league. If you run the plays designed by the coach, if you stay in the openings created by that O line and run behind your full back who will throw perfect blocks for you, the way will be open all the way to the end zone. Will we take some hits sometimes? Of course. But if we trust the coach and run the plays He calls in, we will win!

3 Unstoppable Kingdom Realities. First:

1. **The Plan** - **Transforming God’s people spiritually now, physically later**

“They asked him, ‘Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?’” Acts 1:6

This was a natural question for the disciples to ask, since Jesus’ main topic of his preaching and teaching was the KINGDOM of God. They knew their **Old Testament prophecies**, they knew God had promised to restore the kingdom of David, to bring the people back into the glory of the Promised Land. They knew it would happen one day - the question was when.

Since Jesus had risen from the dead it was natural for them to wonder whether NOW was the time to drive out the Romans and set up the Kingdom! But notice the two flaws in their thinking: 1) “at this time” and 2) “to Israel.”

They wanted an ***IMMEDIATE fix and a NATIONAL fix***. Jesus had much bigger plans for a GLOBAL restoration, and that needed more time.

1. **The Plan** - **Transforming God’s people spiritually now, physically later**

“It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.” Acts 1:7

Jesus said, ***“There is a bigger plan.”*** This isn’t just about ISRAEL - it’s about the whole world. This isn’t just about RIGHT NOW, it’s about preparing for ETERNITY. And there’s a lot of work to do to complete this plan.

Hear this, brothers and sisters, ***“It is not for you to know.”*** Oh, don’t we all want an IMMEDIATE fix and a PHYSICAL fix? We want to be healthy NOW, we want our relationship problems fixed now, we want our financial issues resolved TODAY… “It is not for you to know times and seasons the Father has fixed by His own authority.” What a test of faith.

But when we see the bigger picture of God’s plan for history it strengthens our faith to trust in Him for today. In Jesus’ day the disciples didn’t understand that Jesus came the FIRST TIME to deal with sin and accomplish a spiritual transformation and that He would come a SECOND time to accomplish a total physical transformation of the world.

Biblical prophecy has been compared to **mountain climbing**.



As you approach a mountain you can only see one peak in front of you. But when you reach the top of the first peak, only then can you see that there is another, higher peak, beyond it.



With just the Old Testament, ***it was hard to discern a separation between the first and second comings of Jesus***. Yes, Jesus’ own teachings were clear that the kingdom he was preaching was primarily SPIRITUAL, but he also healed people physically, he also drove out demons, he was concerned with the poor and the oppressed.

But Jesus never once talked about overthrowing Rome. He would not allow the people to make him the King of Israel. In time, and with the Holy Spirit’s guidance, the New Testament writers gradually painted a more and more clear picture of the first mountain peak - Jesus coming to pay for our sins - and the second one - Jesus’ return to restore all things in Himself.

The first unstoppable kingdom reality is God’s plan. He is transforming people spiritually now and He will restore all things physically when Jesus comes back. Second:

1. **The Power** - **Immersing All of God’s People in the Holy Spirit**

“He ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father… ‘You will be baptized with the Holy Spirit…’” Acts 1:4-5

Jesus’ instructions were clear - **the disciples had to WAIT**. They were not to rush off and start preaching the gospel because there was a vital step in God’s plan that still needed to take place: the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

After his resurrection Jesus spent ***40 days visiting*** different disciples and teaching about the kingdom of God. Then he ascended into heaven, which we will study next week. Jesus knew the Holy Spirit was coming 10 days later, on the Day of Pentecost. But all he told the disciples was to wait. And he described what **they were waiting for as a BAPTISM**.

“John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” So the disciples spent ***ten days in prayer, worship and expectation*** - wondering what that meant - to be BAPTIZED with the Holy Spirit.

Still today we practice **baptism by immersion** because that was how they did it. To be baptized was to be immersed in water - dunked all the way under - soaked, saturated. Think of what that means for the average believers’ relationship with God.

Before the Day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit only came upon **a few exceptional believers on a few special occasions**. The Spirit would rush upon judges, would guide and illuminate prophets, would anoint Kings - but only for a specific moment or mission or season of their lives. Remember when the Spirit departed from King Saul and rested on the young boy David? Knowing that was how it worked, David prayed in Psalm 51, “Take not your Holy Spirit from me.” After his terrible sin with Bathsheba and Uriah David knew it was possible the Lord could take away his anointing - and it wasn’t long before the kingdom was torn from him.

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| **Old Covenant** | **New Covenant** |
| Periodic filling of the SpiritUpon a few select individualsConditionally and temporarily | Total immersion with the SpiritUpon all believersUnconditionally and eternally |

That was how it worked in the OLD COVENANT: ***periodic, select, conditional, temporary fillings*** of the Holy Spirit. Not anymore. All of that changed on the Day of Pentecost! That’s why Jesus told the disciples to WAIT. He knew everything was about to change!

Under the New Covenant in Jesus **ALL believers** were totally immersed in the Holy Spirit and this was an unconditional, permanent reality! What a transformation! This is why they needed to wait!

1. **The Power** - **Immersing All of God’s People in the Holy Spirit**

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses.” Acts 1:8

The baptism of the Spirit provided ***the power the disciples needed to accomplish God’s unstoppable plan***. Through prayer they aligned themselves with God’s plan and allowed themselves to be filled up with His power. They did not rush ahead in their own wisdom and strength - which would have failed miserably. They waited. They prayed. They trusted what Jesus told them.

It’s like the contrast between Israel’s attacks on **Jericho and Ai**. Remember your Sunday School lessons? Jericho had the huge, impenetrable walls. But God’s instructions were not to bypass this fortress or to lay siege to it, according to the normal conventions of war. No, God told them to march around it every day for seven days, then shout and blow trumpets. ***Very unconventional war strategy***. But it was God’s plan so it was His way of connecting with His power. Joshua trusted the Lord’s plan, followed the strategy and the walls “came a’tumblin’ down.”

The next **town of Ai** was much smaller with no fortifications. So the army leaders said, “We don’t need the whole army - let’s just take 3,000 guys and we’ll take this little town out.” They didn’t WAIT to consult the Lord. They didn’t pray for His direction. They rushed ahead in their own wisdom, according to their own understanding. And that little, defenseless town whipped those 3,000 soldiers and easily chased them off.

Brothers and sisters, which plan do we tend to follow these days? ***Do we follow the plan for Jericho or for Ai?*** Do we wait on the Lord, listen for His direction and then move forward, aligning our will with His and our desires with His plans? Or do we rush ahead blindly, doing the first thing that comes to mind, and then we wonder why things don’t work out very well…

* With your ***finances*** - do you seek the Lord every month and every year to really discern what to invest in?
* With your ***time*** - do you wait on the Lord in each new season, asking Him to guide you in terms of your priorities?
* With our ***work*** - do we rush ahead into the first opportunity that comes along, usually the one that offers the most money - or do we prayerfully seek God’s will for the work He would have us do?
* With our ***relationships*** - do we simply maintain the friendships we’ve had for years or do we spend time with the Lord to see if it may be time for a new small group or a new accountability or mentoring relationship?

Hear this: God’s plan and God’s power are UNSTOPPABLE kingdom realities. They are like a powerful river flowing into eternity. But we don’t automatically experience His power working through us - **we have to GET IN the river** by aligning our hearts and lives with God’s plan and calling on Him for His power.

***The Gospel will be proclaimed in all nations.*** This is a guarantee of God’s plan for history. The Gospel continues to advance all over the world, like a river that is spreading out and spilling over its banks. The question is not whether that work will take place, the question is whether we will be a part of it. It is entirely possible for individual Christians and whole churches to simply stand on the shore, watching the river flow by.

The invitation and exhortation of this series in Acts is to ***GET IN THE RIVER***. As those who have certainty about the Lord Jesus Christ, we should move forward with unashamed boldness to share the Gospel with those around us and devote ourselves to helping complete the Great Commission.

That is our third Unstoppable Kingdom Reality. God’s plan, God’s power and finally, God’s PROMISE.

1. **The Promise - Gathering worshipers from all nations through the testimony of believers**

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and ***you will be my witnesses*** in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Acts 1:8

This promise was initially for **11 men** - Peter, James, John, Andrew and the others. Jesus knew they would be called upon to TESTIFY about all they had seen and heard - their three years with Jesus and especially the last days of Jesus’ earthly life. They had to be His witnesses, and they all were His witnesses. They testified boldly that Jesus rose from the dead. All 11 stood firm in that testimony and all but John were executed for their beliefs (John being exiled).

The promise was initially for those 11 and the other believers with them in Jerusalem. But the promise was **not just for them**. You can see the scope of the promise was ***“to the end of the earth.”*** By the end of Acts the Gospel reached to Rome - but even that was not “the end of the earth,” in those days. The Roman Empire extended to Spain in the west, north Africa in the south and Britain in the north. So this promise remains true **for US today**!

Hear this, brother, sister - **YOU** ***will receive power***, since the Holy Spirit has come upon you - and YOU WILL BE a witness for Jesus in your family, in your workplace, in your neighborhood, in your city and to the end of the earth! We don’t all share the gospel in the same way - some are more assertive and others more quiet and reserved - but all Christians are called to witness. Charles Spurgeon said, ***“Every Christian is either a missionary or an impostor.”***

**All of us** have been sent on the mission to make disciples of all nations. All of us are a part of God’s plan, filled with His unstoppable Spirit and emboldened with this promise - you WILL receive power and you will be my witnesses.

This is God’s unstoppable promise. He will gather people from every nation! Look at Revelation 7:

1. **The Promise - Gathering worshipers from all nations through the testimony of believers**

“After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, ***from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages***, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.” Revelation 7:9

***The only reason Jesus has not yet come back is because He is still gathering***. There are still people right here in Tampa Bay who need to hear the Gospel. There are still people in distant lands who need to hear the Good News of Jesus. God is gathering worshipers from EVERY nation, all tribes, every people and language! And He will finish this work!

The means by which God will finish this work is ***the TESTIMONY of believers***. WE are the means. It is not angels who will finish the work. It is not a direct voice from heaven that will finish the work. Famines, earthquakes, disasters and wars may help awaken in people a fear of God but none of those fearful things can save them. Only the Word of God shared by a child of God can bring someone into the family of God. They need to hear. So we need to go!

**Lucas Pulley** is the Director of the Tampa Underground. That’s not a subway - I understand that would not work very well in Florida. No, the Underground is a network of microchurches and missional communities. I met up with Lucas a couple of weeks ago and was inspired by his story.

Lucas is from Illinois, like me. He went to Southern Illinois University, in the distant cornfields of the state, and not far from St. Louis. He came to Christ through ***InverVarsity Christian Fellowship*** and quickly got involved in their discipleship, fellowship and outreach activities. Since he didn’t grow up in church, he didn’t know what Sunday church should look and feel like. But as he read the New Testament, and especially the book of Acts, the churches there in Carbondale, Illinois, did not seem to match what he was reading in the Bible. They were disconnected from their communities, they were isolated and inward focused.

He didn’t set out to create an underground network of microchurches. He and his fellow IV leaders just followed the Spirit’s leading to **minister to people in their community**. They knew that most of the local homeless people gathered in a certain place, so they brought a crock pot of barbeque to that place and served the folks who were there (violating almost every food preparation and food service code, but not knowing it). After hanging out with that group of people for a couple of hours they asked if they could come back the next week, and the week after. And before long, in his words, “they became a family.”

The local soup kitchen was closed down, ironically, for health code violations, so now their friends on the street had even more needs. So this little group of IV students started a soup kitchen.

They didn’t have a grand vision for a global movement of house churches and missional communities. They didn’t even know what to call what they were doing. They were just serving their neighbors; just loving people.

So when Lucas and his friends graduated they had to make a decision. Do we disperse to wherever we can find jobs, or do we stay here and continue what we started? They all felt led by the Lord to stay. So they got whatever jobs they could in Carbondale, Illinois, and kept loving the people in their community, kept doing church like they read about it in the book of Acts.

In time they connected with the Tampa Underground and Lucas came down to learn what was happening here. Four years ago he moved here and gives leadership to 110 microchurches and missional communities scattered around the Tampa area loving and serving different groups of people in different ways.

The gospel is moving forward all over the world. That is one story from a small town in Illinois and from our own city. That same story is being repeated in a million ways all over the world.

***What does it mean for you and for me?***

**Confidence in these realities produces Boldness with the Gospel**

“I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.” Romans 1:16

We have CERTAINTY about who Jesus is and what He has done. Based on these three unstoppable Kingdom realities, we should have great BOLDNESS to jump into the river of God’s plan and the power of His Spirit, contributing to the fulfillment of His promise to gather people from all nations!

Let’s pray.