

THE STORYFORMED WAY

Part 8: The Mission and Power

Questions for Personal Study

Can you connect Luke 24.44-49 to the OT Story? What is Jesus saying?

What difference does it make to see Jesus as the hero of the Story?

Luke again at Luke 24.46-47: What has Jesus done?

What does Jesus tell the disciples to be and do in Luke 24.47-48?

Why do you think Jesus tells the disciples to “wait for power” in 24.49?

Have you experienced the power of the Spirit in your life?

Questions for Study in Community

Begin by sharing your personal experience of the Holy Spirit.

Do our experiences match what we see in Luke and Acts? How?

What does the Holy Spirit want to do in the church? To what end?

How can we welcome the work of the Spirit among our MC?

Questions for Staying on Mission

If the Holy Spirit is going to empower your mission, what is required of you?

Set aside time together to wait and pray for the Spirit’s work among you!!

For Further Reading and Learning

Lovelace: “A factor which should be considered in explaining Pentecostal and ordinary Evangelical experience of the Spirit is that many Christians who have spoken in tongues were not particularly aiming at that gift but were seeking a deeper level of empowering and effectiveness as Christians. While seeking, they were led to a crisis situation in which they were encouraged to move fully into the light concerning every primary provision of redemption, laying hold of justification, opening their lives unreservedly to sanctification and recognizing the Holy Spirit as sanctifier and empowerer. It is not surprising that in this process they came to a pronounced forward movement in sanctification and a new infilling of the Spirit. Such an experience is guaranteed by Jesus: ‘Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you... If you then who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him’ (Luke 11.9, 13).”

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The Story and Our Story

For 7 weeks now we’ve been looking at the Storyline of the Bible, trying to trace how the Bible “works” as the unfolding tale of God’s redemptive work through history. Many people view the Bible as a compilation of largely unrelated stories about individual people and how those people related to God. In that sense, we tend to read the Bible as a “man-centered” work, all about what we should be doing and how we should be doing it, in relation to God. Especially for people who have grown up in the church, the Bible has come to be seen primarily as a moral handbook for life. For these people, a simply summary of the message of the Bible is, “Do this, and you will live.”

But the Bible is not primarily about us. Yes, it has commands and instructions, and yes, it is filled with stories about individuals (and communities!) and how they relate to God. But the Bible is primarily a record of how God has worked in history; it is primarily about Him. A better summary of the Bible would be, “God has done this so you can live!” The Bible is about how God rescues sinners, how he extends his grace to those who, through their own rebellion and unbelief, have earned death. The Bible tells the story of how God creates a perfect world, how we ruin it, and how he works through history to fix the mess we’ve made. The Bible is good news about what God has done, not good advice about what we should do!

God Steps Into the Story

The climax of the Bible is the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The entire Old Testament is pointing forward to the coming of Jesus. The Old Testament is about God’s promise to Abraham that some day God is going to rescue and heal his world. God works with Abraham and his descendants, Israel, over thousands of years, rescuing and growing this people into his special people. This special people receive God’s blessing, his law, and his mission to bring His blessing to the ends of the earth. But the Old Testament ends with Israel’s failure to become that which God intended them to be. Israel didn’t trust and worship God alone, and so he couldn’t use them to bless the nations.

But God sends the prophets to his people to tell some good news: though they have failed, God's purposes have not. Out the ashes of Israel's failure to be the people through whom God will redeem the world, God is going to raise up a "new Israel," a solitary individual, a Servant, who will do what Israel and the world could never do. In Jesus Christ, God comes to do what he promised thousands of years ago to Abraham. God actually steps into his own Story, into our world, and puts on flesh. God becomes a man to do for men what we could never do. Jesus lives a perfect life, he dies a sacrificial death for the sin of the world, and then rises 3 days later as the triumphant and victorious Lord of the universe. This is the Gospel, the good news about God's great rescue of the world through Jesus! God has finally and fully done it!

Where Did Jesus Go?

But the Story of the Bible doesn't end with this climax. Though everything has radically changed through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, the implications of that momentous event must get worked out in the real world. This is where the book of Acts fits in the Story. Acts traces the history of God's work in the world immediately after Jesus. 40 days after Jesus' resurrection, he returns to heaven, physically leaving our world to sit down at the right hand of God the Father. Called the Ascension, Jesus' return to his Father is predicted by the prophet Daniel: "I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed" (Daniel 7.13-14).

Jesus does not actually go into the clouds, as if heaven were somewhere way above earth. Heaven is a different realm, God's realm, where God dwells outside of our time-space continuum. But the Ascension does not teach that Jesus is "gone for now;" rather, the Ascension reminds us that Jesus is on his throne *right now*, ruling over this world as the rightful King, and that one day his kingdom will fully come and every knee will bow before him! Everything that the disciples are about to experience in the absence of Jesus physically is being ruled over by the risen and exalted Jesus. Jesus is no longer a poor peasant from Galilee; he is the risen and exalted King, the Lord of the Universe, sitting at the right hand of God Almighty, exalted in power and majesty!

A Weighty Responsibility

Before Jesus leaves his disciples, he gives them the great missionary task of taking the Good News of all that God has done in Jesus to the ends of the earth. "Go and make disciples" says Matthew; "You are witnesses of these things" says Luke; "As the Father has sent me, so I send you" says John. In their own way, each Gospel writer is saying the same thing: Because God has forgiven sin in Jesus, his blessing has returned to the earth, just as he predicted to Abraham thousands of years ago, so now the disciples must take this blessing to the nations! The whole world must hear the message!

Imagine how overwhelmed these disciples must have felt when Jesus said the *whole world!* At this point in the Story there are about 120 disciples and followers of Jesus. And they are given an enormous task: get this message to the ends of the earth, in full realization that, just as religious and political leaders murdered their King, so they would be risking their lives to do it! Luke calls them "witnesses," the very Greek word from which we get the word martyr!

An Incredible Power

Fortunately for these first disciples, Jesus has no intention of leaving them to figure this out on their own! Just before his Ascension, Jesus tells the disciples to remain in Jerusalem and "wait for power from on high." A few days later, as they are all waiting and praying, the Holy Spirit descends upon the whole group of them, and they all begin to speak the gospel message - in different languages! The point is clear: Jesus has come by his Spirit to continue the work he begun by sending his church to proclaim and demonstrate the kingdom of God! Jesus himself will take responsibility to get the good news to the nations!

The rest of the book of Acts traces the powerful advancement of the kingdom through these disciples. As they preached, shared their lives together, served the needy, and performed miracles in the power of the Spirit, the church grew rapidly. The Story was told again and again, and many people repented of sin, believed in the Lord Jesus, and were baptized into the new people of God. That which God had promised to Abraham was being fulfilled now by this new, gospel-formed people - the church!

Acts ends with the great missionary, Paul, in prison in Rome. And though he is not a free man, the gospel message is being proclaimed unhindered, right under the nose of the Roman Emperor! The church is created by the gospel word and the power of the Spirit, and spreads God's blessing to the nations!