

Cd Gv286 a Breath From the Book of Acts

by George Verwer

The book of Acts shows us the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in the early church and how we can apply that to our lives today by being witnesses for Christ, praying and fasting, and living in unity and oneness with other believers.

Topics: "Church Revitalization", "Materialism Vs Faith"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of prioritizing the preaching of the word of God over material possessions. He criticizes the modern church for being more concerned with financial gain and personal comfort than with spreading the message of Jesus. The speaker highlights the miracles and wonders performed by the apostles in the book of Acts, emphasizing the need for the right gifts to be used in accordance with God's plan and timing. He also discusses the four pillars of the church: steadfastness in doctrine, fellowship, breaking bread, and prayer. The sermon concludes with a critique of the church's focus on wealth and materialism, calling for a return to the selfless and compassionate ministry exemplified by Peter in Acts.

Transcript

I'd like you to look into Acts. And I'd like us to just take a little tour of the book of Acts. You know, the big thing for the Americans these days, and I never, I'm constantly amazed by what these people are doing.

The big thing for the Americans is to go to the Holy Land. And if you organize a tour to the Holy Land, you go free, you see. So that's why everybody's organizing tours.

And down to the Holy Land, and you tour around and see the mess they've made of the place. And I've had to go there because we often have teens working in Israel. And one time I was walking around, having my prayer time in the morning, and I ended up at the Wailing Wall.

But I want to take you on a more important tour before we go in and see our little film strip. I want to take you just quickly through the book of Acts. When's the last time you took a tour of the book of Acts? It is a dynamic book.

Go through this book very quickly. Wet your appetite that you'll go back and memorize it. Wouldn't it be good if you memorized the book of Acts? It's good.

Do that next month. Memorize the book of Acts. The Muslims memorize the whole Quran.

We have one young man in Oman who's memorized one half of the New Testament. It's good. Memorize the Word of God.

But in any case, study. Now, understand that the book of Acts is not a theological book. If you want a theological book, you've got to turn over to Romans.

You've got to get into the Epistles. Of course, any theology in the book of Acts is true. But it's not primarily a theological book.

It's a historical record. It's a book of Acts. And it's a transitional book in that we're moving from the Gospels, and we're moving into the age of the church.

And we see a lot of things that in our first study, we can't quite understand. There are a lot of people that claim that the book is loaded with contradictions. Because they've tended to judge it on the surface.

They haven't tried to understand what the Holy Spirit is saying and doing in this book. It really should be called Acts of the Holy Spirit. Not Acts of the Apostles.

Because if the Holy Spirit had not come, and if these men had not been filled with the Holy Spirit, there'd be no book of Acts. And we today, as we are called to witness, as we are called to move out, we are to write Acts chapter 29 and 30, 31. Maybe we're up to chapter 200 by now.

You are one of the characters in God's greater book of Acts. You know that? How would you fit in? Where do you fit in? As you study some of these other men you read about in the book of Acts. Well, let's start.

Does everybody have their Bible? Let's see your Bibles. Hold your Bible up. We know you're tired Sunday afternoon.

Hold it up. Praise the Lord. Good.

Bring the word of God. Wherever you go, D.L. Moody said, if you walk down the street with your Bible, you'll preach a sermon every 10 steps or something like that. Book of Acts chapter 1. Just want to give you, let us say, some of the verses that just have made such an impact on those of us in this movement.

And I'm sure on many of you. Acts 1 verse 8. But ye shall receive power after the Holy Ghost has come upon you, and you shall be witnesses unto me in Jerusalem, in Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost part of the earth. And when he had spoken these things while they beheld, he was taken up, and the cloud received him out of their sight.

In other words, this was the final word that Jesus gave. This is probably one of the most neglected verses in the Bible. And yet it's probably one of the most important because it's the final word just before Jesus left.

He could have told us to do so many other things. He could have told us to build Sunday schools, build hospitals. He could have told us to do this, to do that good things, wonderful things, do relief work, feed the poor.

But he said, ye shall be witnesses. Witness. Not only in Jerusalem where they were, but in Judea, in Samaria, and the uttermost part of the earth.

On this film strip in a little while, we are going to see some of the places that represent the uttermost parts. We're going to hear about one half the world that lies in total darkness as far as the gospel is concerned. And I've just been in Nepal, where among 12 million, there's a handful of witnesses.

I've been in Afghanistan, where among 14 million, there are maybe 14 Afghani believers. I've just come from Bangladesh, where we have a hundred workers for 75 million souls. And Sri Lanka, and parts of India, and Doha, where I was five months ago, where there's not a lone living believer.

Not one. Not one! Because Acts 1.8 has never been taken seriously by the Church of Jesus Christ. And we're all hanging around Jerusalem.

95% or at least 90% of Christian work done by Englishmen is done among Englishmen. And I say that is a crime of the Church in the British Isles today. Acts 1.8 should be burned into our hearts.

We may get God's priority, that we may stop being led by subjective intuition and cheap sentimentality, and that we may become objectively obedient to the commands of God, which will make us witnesses. Yes, in Manchester for sure, and Judea, and Samaria, that's Belgium, that's France, that's Yugoslavia, that's Turkey, that's Afghanistan, yeah, Nepal, Bangladesh, and the regions beyond. I don't think this is a tangent.

I think it's a basic concept. Of course, this verse follows up on the verse in the latter part of Mark, the latter part of Matthew, where we're told to go into all the world, where we're told to go and preach the gospel, and in John where it says, so as my father sent me, so send I you, and at least dozens of other verses that could be given, such as the verse where Paul explains that he himself wants to preach the gospel, where Christ has not been named before. You know, the best way to get the gospel today is to become a hippie.

There's more Christian work among hippies than there are among all the Indians in India, or all the Bengalis in Bangladesh, and all the Nepalis in Nepal. I talked to a hippie some time ago, a fellow who'd been given so many tracts, he had so many people pastoring him about the so-called Jesus Revolution. He was fed up.

Most of the hippies were all fed up with his business. They're now vomiting it out. They can tell you what it's all about.

50% at least of all the people who make commitments to the Jesus movement have completely backslidden. A minimum of 50%. And that is not unusual.

That happens in most spiritual movements. That doesn't mean the movement was not valid. But these people have so many opportunities.

Another good way, if you want to get the gospel, is become a drug addict. You got a sure chance you get a drug addict, and they'll be on your doorstep giving you the gospel. But if you happen to have the situation in which you were born a Nepali, you'll probably never hear.

If you were born a Rajasthani, you'll probably never hear. If you're born an Afghani, you'll surely never hear. If you're born a Turk, you'll probably never hear.

In fact, if you're born in any one of half the world's areas, you'll probably never once hear even the name of Jesus Christ, except if somebody swears. It's not fair. Acts 1A.

Because these people believe this message, they gathered and we see them in Acts 1.14. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication with the women in Mary, the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren. The Word of God. The first thing they did was to pray.

The last thing we do today is pray. How is the prayer meeting in your church? Is it a time in which people are gathered in heartfelt prayer and repentance and sometimes tears for the lost men and women all around us? Or is it just a midweek ritual attended by a tiny minority who pray the same prayer week after week? Oh, may God breathe upon our prayer meetings. May God breathe upon our personal prayer times that we may once again know this kind of prayer, which is the heartbeat of the Book of Acts.

We notice the same thing in Chapter 2. In Chapter 2, of course, the Holy Spirit came. There was Pentecost. In those days, they knew the power of the Holy Spirit.

In our days, we know the theology of the Holy Spirit. In those days, they knew the reality of the Holy Ghost and didn't have one book about it. Today, we've got 500 books on the Holy Spirit, but we don't have a reality.

The power, the dynamic, the perseverance, and the love the Holy Spirit alone can produce. So the Holy Spirit came upon these people and we see, therefore, a description of their lives in the last part of Chapter 2, verse 42. Notice it, please.

And these continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine. Sound doctrine is important. That's why a vital part of our own ministry is to ground people in the Word of God.

I personally, in the past six months, have been through an intensive Bible study program which involved rereading the Bible through, plus the New Testament twice in five months, which involved going through 100 Bible messages on tape recordings, which involved a few other things, because I'm still a learner. Bible doctrine, sound doctrine, is absolutely essential and the church is being torn apart because we don't have the Bible teaching like we should. We want little 20-minute sermon ditties.

We want little inspirational talks or a film. We don't want to get into the Word of God and get the theology and the Bible doctrine that will keep us straight and to keep us from the dozens of sidetracks that are leading many people astray today. And so these people continued steadfastly.

I love that word. It's the complete opposite of my nature. Steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine.

Fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer. Dr. Singh calls it the four pillars of the church. And the church, without these pillars, is going to end up on the ground.

Then it goes on, some very unpleasant verses. You know, the old time saints used to study the Bible with a pen and a pencil. Modern evangelicals should study with a pair of scissors and cut out all the verses they have no intentions of ever obeying.

When we look at the Bible, we think, first of all, will this fit into my culture? Secondly, we ask, will my wife accept this? Or will my husband accept it? Thirdly, will my employer accept it? Fourthly, what will happen to my salary if I do that? Fifthly, what will happen to my free time? Sixthly, what will happen to my wardrobe? Seventhly, what kind of a car will I drive? Eighthly, what will happen to my bank account? When we ask 20 other questions, then we come, well, now let's see if I can obey this. By then we've taken the scissors out already, and we might as well have cut out the whole chapter. And so we read in verse

43, and fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done by the Apostles, be careful there, you know, it's not every new convert that runs out and raises the dead.

We had someone like that on OM years ago. Just saying, wanted to go raise the dead and call down the angels of heaven and everything else. God gives gifts.

You better make sure you've got the right gift and use it according to God's plan and God's timing and God's way. You get God's blessing. Many wonders were done.

God is a God of miracles. We like that verse. We like the verse 41 as well.

3,000 souls added to the church. But the verse that we don't like, and we totally reject, is verse 44 and 45. And all that believe were together had all things common.

Wow. Especially the Americans, they just literally leap out of their shoes. How did that communist verse get in the Bible? They're coming out with a new Nixon translation.

Get that verse out of the Bible. But you know, that kind of communism is very biblical. That's just love.

That's just love. In that situation, they live in common. You know, on a ship we find that system is good.

We don't have any doctrine that way. We don't believe you have to go be in common with the man next door to you. But love should be there and someday you may be in that situation as we often are, and then you can put more of those things into practice.

It's expediency, not legalism. It's love, not law. The love is there.

So the sharing was there. Look at verse 45. They sold their possessions and goods and part of them to all men as every man had need.

Do you find that today? Is that what you find today? We go back to our homes and we look on our bookshelves. We have 10 different versions of the Bible. We've got Christian books.

We've got everything you could dream up. And yet you can go out to Bangladesh and meet pastors that don't have a Bible. You can meet people that don't have a gospel or a tract or anything else.

Is that fair? Is that right? Is that the kind of Christian faith we're reading about here? No. And the trouble is, this is too revolutionary for us and so we've developed a new faith. In America, it's American Christianity.

In England, it's English Christianity. In French, it's French Christianity. And my burden, the cry of my heart is that we'll lay aside our English, French, and American Christianity and go back to God's Christianity.

Which is rough and is tough and will cut cross grain to our culture and may lead many of us out of the comfortable confines of this beautiful little island where even if you don't work a day in your life, you can live comfortably. May God take us back to the book of Acts. May it continue daily with one accord and unity.

Oh, how we need it. In the temple, breaking up bread from house to house, we need that as well. Eating their meat with gladness and singleness of heart.

Praising God and having fervor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved. Book of Acts Christianity.

That's what I want. There isn't any one pattern in the book of Acts. Different groups have gone into the book of Acts and have come out with different patterns.

The Anglicans claim their pattern is from here and I can see some points. The Pentecostals claim their pattern is from here. The Brethren are absolutely positive their pattern is from here.

The Lutherans are convinced their pattern is from here. It's only the fool person who I believe can possibly say that none of these groups can find anything here. It's only their group.

So we continue to fight over the pattern. And we continue to beat each other up and carve each other up. As Billy Graham said, we take the sword of the Spirit instead of using it to reach a world for Christ, we carve each other up.

Like a young man said on Sunday afternoon, all we have in my family for Sunday dinner is roast preacher. Oh, may God show us that we may not find out till we get to heaven which pattern is right. Okay, you're convinced your pattern is right.

I've got a few convictions as well. Fine, but that pattern without this power is nothing. That pattern without this dynamic, without this love, without this unselfishness, without this flow of Holy Spirit reality is sounding brass and tingling cymbal.

And that's why God in some places is breaking the pattern and doing some very, very different things. That's how O.M. got into the story. Because God is doing unusual things because God's first burden is still to reach the world for Christ.

Apart from His desire for communion with you. And that is really finished. Not me.

His greatest desire is that others be brought in to the same communion, the same fellowship. Our time has gone by very quickly let's just get a few more little sightseeing points from this book. As we go into chapter 3 we find Peter.

This is really an unpleasant story. They met a man who was lame. The man wanted money.

And Peter said in verse 6, Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have, give I thee. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk. What's happened to the church? We of course can't say any longer silver and gold have I none.

That's for sure. The property we have. The money we have.

We can't even begin to imagine. The church in the world today is a multi-billion pound operation. I can go right now back to the USA and take a pastorate for 6,000 quid a year plus expenses and a vicarage or manse or whatever you want to call it that you couldn't even describe.

The money is flowing out of the evangelical church and it's not just states or Sweden. It's here as well. Just show a special film and you can charge one pound to get in.

Open a holiday center and you can put the price anywhere you want. But when it comes to giving the word of God to the world, we refuse to do it. Oh may God give us this testimony of Peter.

Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have, I give thee. The power, the reality, the love, the compassion that flowed from that man's life and until we go back to that, I don't think there's any hope. Then we go into chapter 4. We find so much happening in chapter 4 it boggles our minds.

You can write a novel. You can write a 10 chapter novel chapter 4 of the book of Acts just building up around what happened. Just let your mind run a little bit.

These men of God, their boldness. Verse 13. Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John and I believe one of the things that proves the lack of spiritual power in our lives is our shyness, our unwillingness to speak.

Right now in Manchester, Sri Maharaji has his faith all over the city. This 15 year old boy, who they believe is greater than the Lord Jesus Christ. He has 5,000 followers in Britain today.

He has a big ashram in Manchester. I met one of their followers on the train the other day. Gave me his magazine.

Gave me his literature. Dedicated to this new man who they believe is much, much greater than Jesus Christ. His face is plastered all over Manchester this morning.

The bold Sri Maharaji. His war. They speak of giving them their lives.

He's only one of a hundred cults that young people are dedicated to. That young people are sold out to. Oh, not we evangelicals.

We prefer campfires and choruses. We prefer another holiday in the hills with a guitar singer and a few spiritual ditties and another notebook full of notes that we never do live. Not that I'm against a Christian holiday.

I'm not against it. But unless we start to advance, unless we start to get some of this kind of Christianity into our spiritual bloodstream, we're doomed. We won't even reach England, much less the rest of the world.

So we see these people bold. They could not be stopped. Even when they were beaten up in the last chapter, last verses of chapter five.

What happened? They were beaten up. They were told not to speak anymore. What happened? First of all, they praise the Lord.

Verse 41 of chapter five, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. Then verse 42, daily in the temple and in every house, they cease not to teach and preach Jesus Christ. And we could go into chapter seven where Stephen is martyred for the sake of Christ and he was only a deacon, huh? Practical man.

Martyr for the sake of Christ. And see the ministry of Philip, the way the Holy Spirit led him to the Ethiopian. Oh, for people that are available like that, I believe that if this week you will pray the prayer of Philip and you will become available to the Holy Spirit and you will spend time with God in his word in the

morning that he will give you a soul this very week.

Just as he gave Philip. At least he will give you a contact who will eventually become a soul. And then we go on into chapter nine and we find this reckless enemy of Christianity converted and his life turned upside down.

And we always like to say, Paul is somebody special. We can't expect to be like Paul and yet Paul says in Corinthians writing to even carnal believers, be ye followers of me. What are we going to do with that? Be ye followers of me.

Paul's life is not the abnormal life. He's not a spiritual freak. Paul was a normal Christian.

He may have had greater gifts, but his basic life, his basic philosophy, his dynamic was a normal Christian life. And if you want to, it can be yours as well. But not without a cost.

It cost Paul his sight quite a few days. Cost him his life. Almost did.

Again and again. I don't know what going over the wall in a basket is like, but I don't think it's my cup of tea. This man was living in constant fear of death.

And yet he kept going, going, going. You remember the group of men that said, we are not going to eat until Paul is dead. Now, how would you feel then if a local group around here came to you and said, we hate you with a passion, Mr. Scott.

We are not eating until you are dead. I'd like to interview your wife on that point. Paul lived under this kind of impossible situation.

This kind of pressure. Everybody's talking about pressure. You know where most of the pressure is? Between your chin and your top of your head.

We create it. Paul, with all this pressure, with all this difficulty, he lived free like a bird. Why? Because he could say, my strength is made perfect in weakness.

His grace is sufficient. His strength is made perfect in weakness. I can do all things through Jesus Christ.

Everybody comes to me. I have more people on this than any other theme telling me how limited they are. I don't know what they think I am.

They come to me and they say, well, I'm not a George Brewer. I'm not a Jonathan McCroskey. I'm not this.

I'm so limited. Not Paul. Paul comes forth, though he knew his limitation, though he's weak, he admitted that.

He said, I can do all things through Jesus Christ. Where are men like that today? You need a combination of a telescope and a microscope to find them. Oh, may God show us.

I'm not giving you a story this afternoon. This is not planograph time. This is the word of God that we as evangelicals claim to believe.

There's not time to go into chapter 10, 11, 12, 13. You'll have to study it on your own. But I beg of you, let's get back to the book.

Let's turn away from sentimental English Christianity or sentimental American Christianity. Let's get back to the real thing, not in word, but in deed. Whatever it costs.

Because it's the only hope for the millions who are waiting and waiting and waiting to hear of Jesus Christ. Oh, I know this message can be easily misunderstood. It's only one message.

If you read my little book, Revolution of Balance, or Come Live, Die, or a few other books I've written, like pseudo-discipleship, you'll get the other side of the message. But unfortunately, I can only preach one message at a time. But I can tell you all the other messages I can preach without this central heart throb of the book of Acts becomes meaningless.

Mere words. All the theories I can give you about the victorious life and I preach about the victorious life far more than I preach what I've just preached now will be of no value unless it produces the same result it produced in the book of Acts. It's one thing to talk.

It's another thing to walk. In a few minutes, we are going to see, I believe, one of the most dynamic challenges on filmstrip I have ever seen. And yet, unless we are hungry for reality, unless we go in with a spirit of learners, unless we go in with a desire to be obedient, not just hearers of the word, but doers, whatever it costs, whatever it leads, whatever the price, it's better not to go and waste your time watching.

May God give us the grace to make this Sunday afternoon this beautiful sunny day, a day of renewal and recommitment. God may do a new thing in our hearts and our lives for his glory. Let us pray.

Oh, Lord, our God, we know what we've spoken about today is only part of the challenge. There are so many other great truths about your sufficiency, about the power of your Holy Spirit, about the crucified life and the resurrection life and what it is to abide in Christ, what it is to just walk in the spirit, so many other great truths. But, oh, Lord, we know that when these things become reality, we will see Book of Acts Christianity.

We'll see this kind of love, this kind of unselfishness, this kind of power, this kind of witness, this kind of boldness, this kind of fearlessness. And, Lord, we know for the likes of us, it will take many years, but we want that road. Forgive us of unbelief.

Forgive us of cowardice. Help us, Lord, face up to the issue. Put our hands on the plow and not turn back.

For we pray in the name of the living Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

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