

Acts 1

by John Nelson Darby

The sermon emphasizes the importance of waiting for the baptism of the Holy Ghost and the power it brings, as well as the intimacy of the Lord with His disciples and the significance of the Holy Ghost being sent after the Lord's ascension.

Scripture: Acts 1:4

Topics: "The Holy Spirit", "Witnessing for Christ"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the significance of the Holy Spirit's coming and the disciples' role as witnesses after Jesus' ascension. He highlights the intimate relationship between Christ and His disciples, reassuring them of His presence and the promise of the Holy Spirit. The sermon reflects on the disciples' expectations of a restored kingdom for Israel and the importance of waiting for the Spirit's empowerment. Darby also notes the disciples' unity in prayer and their selection of Matthias to replace Judas, illustrating their commitment to fulfilling God's plan. Ultimately, the message conveys hope in Christ's return and the joy of being in His presence forever.

Transcript

Let us now come to the examination of the narrative itself. This begins with the great truth of which we have already spoken. The disciples were to wait at Jerusalem for the baptism of the Holy Ghost. We shall find again the proof of another precious truth. The Lord, after His resurrection, gave commissions to His disciples by the Holy Ghost. We shall not lose the Holy Ghost when we are raised again: truth perhaps simple, but which makes us feel how great will be our capacity for happiness in that state. Now a great portion of our spiritual strength is employed to enable us to walk in integrity, in spite of the flesh and the temptations of the enemy; but then neither the one nor the other will exist. All the power of the Spirit in us will be employed in rendering us fit for the infinite felicity we shall find there. We shall enjoy it according to the strength of the Spirit, as Christ gave gifts by the Spirit to His disciples after His resurrection.

322 Remark now the intimacy of the Lord with His disciples. He spoke of the things belonging to the kingdom of God. Christ is now glorified, but His heart, full of divine love, is not removed, is not any the farther away from His own. When He appeared to Saul, He said, "I am Jesus of Nazareth whom thou persecutest." He speaks to Ananias with authority it is true, but as with a friend, opening His heart respecting Saul, and sending Ananias to speak to him.

He was not ashamed to call His disciples friends on the earth; He is not ashamed to treat them as friends now. Immense blessing! To feel that the Lord of glory is near to us, that He holds us as friends and loved ones, and that He can feel compassion also for our infirmities.

The disciples expected still the visible kingdom of the Lord in Israel; their hearts were still Jewish. They quite believed that He had risen again, but expected that their hopes of the restoration of Israel as a nation would be realised by the Lord, now that He had come out of the sepulchre. The Lord did not tell them that the kingdom would not be restored to Israel; but that it did not concern them to know the times and seasons which the Father had put in His own power. The kingdom shall be restored to Israel - when is not revealed. The Son of man will come in an hour when He is not expected. He sits at the right hand of God the Father till His enemies shall be made His footstool. In the meantime He gathers His co-heirs, those who are content to suffer with Him; and caught up into glory we shall reign with Him. It is not revealed then, it was not revealed to the disciples - the hour of the Saviour's return; but they should receive, said the Lord, not many days hence, the power of the Holy Ghost, which should come on them, and they should be witnesses to Him in Jerusalem, in Judaea, in Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth. And, having said these things, He was taken up, while they beheld, and a cloud received Him and took Him away out of their sight. They were to be eyewitnesses as far as this point of His heavenly glory. The Holy Ghost was sent after Him (see John 15:26, 27). We shall find later that Saul saw Him in His heavenly glory for the first time, of which thing he was to be the special witness. How the Holy Ghost has rendered clear testimony to this glory, we shall see in the discourses in the Acts; and again it may be seen in the epistles of Peter and elsewhere.

323 But here is found, before the coming of the Holy Ghost, a very remarkable testimony rendered by means of angels. The disciples had their eyes fixed on the heavens while Jesus was going there. This was very natural. The beloved Saviour, given back to them from the grave, was, apparently at least, abandoning them again - for heaven, it is true, which ought to have strengthened their faith. He had left a promise of the power of the Spirit, which, however, had not yet come; and therefore the consciousness and direction of this power, which was to reveal all the truth, was wanting to them. He had gone away, and what should they do? They must wait.

And as their eyes were then fixed on the heavens, behold, two by appearance men, but in reality angels, stood beside them, asking why they looked up into heaven, and making them the revelation of His return. A fact very remarkable, since the Lord had, after the Lord's supper, made known to the disciples that He was going to the Father; and the first consolation He gave His disciples was that He would come again and take them to Himself in the Father's house, where He was going to prepare them a place; then He speaks of the presence of the Comforter which was to be accomplished. There He speaks of His coming to introduce His own into the Father's house; here, of His glorious appearing, when He will make Himself seen from the place where He has gone. There He Himself speaks of the special privilege of His own according to His personal affection which He had for them. He wished to console them, His heart had need of them; He desired to have them near to Himself, in the same glory, so that they might see His glory, but especially that, where He was, there they might be also. Here it is His return in glory, which would be like His going away.

This was the disciples' first consolation, once they were deprived of His presence. Then another Comforter would be given to dwell with them meanwhile here below. But whether in the declaration on the part of the Lord in His love, or in the revelation made by the angels, the first thing in the Saviour's heart and in the revelations of God is that He will come again. Immense is the gift of the Spirit during His absence, and for

ever immense is the nature of the state in which redemption has placed the assembly of God here below: but its hope is, and the height of its joy will be, to see the Saviour as He is, to be always with Him, like Him, to see and to be for ever with Him who does love us and has washed us from our sins in His own blood, and to see Him face to face! Greatest blessing, too great for us, if not the fruit of something still greater - the cross and the sufferings of the Son of God.

324 Once this blessed Saviour has suffered, and the Son of God has been made sin for us, and has died as a man on the cross, nothing is too great; it will only be the fruit of the travail of His soul. He shall be satisfied; His love shall be satisfied in our happiness and in our presence with Him. Look only at Zephaniah 3:17, where the love and the glory are inferior to this: "Jehovah thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love; he will joy over thee with singing." The Father will rest in His love, and in the accomplishment of all His counsels for the glory of His Son; shewing, at the same time, in the ages to come, the excellency of the riches of His grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus. Such is our expectation.

The disciples return to Jerusalem, and live there together in an upper chamber. They persevered with one consent in supplication and prayer, with the women and with Mary, the mother of Jesus, and His brethren. But the effect of the promise of the Father is only found in chapter 2. All that we have at the end of chapter 1 is connected with a Jewish situation; that is, with the condition of the disciples before the coming of the Spirit, yet possessing an understanding which had been opened by the Lord to understand the word. They had not the power of the Spirit, but intelligence of the word; because their standing was in relation with Christ raised up from the dead, they were enlightened by the divine light communicated to them after His resurrection. These verses accord perfectly with verses 14-48 of Luke 24. Then comes the promise of the Spirit, the accomplishment of which is found in chapter 2.

The well-known active energy of Peter employs the knowledge given by the Lord, applying Psalm 109 to Judas, whose office, says the psalm, another should take. They drew lots, according to Jewish custom, leaving the decision in the hands of God. Matthias is chosen and added to the eleven apostles. Verses 18, 19 are a parenthesis. The sabbath-day's journey, the lots, and all the circumstances, shew clearly the actual state of the disciples and the thought of the Holy Ghost on this step. They work with intelligence of the word of the Old Testament; but the Spirit had not yet come. It is important for us to understand the difference. The Spirit gives now intelligence (1 Cor. 2:14); but this is not of itself power.

325 The Lord is faithful to lead His own in the path of truth. His grace is sufficient, His strength is made perfect in weakness, and also He always gives us the strength necessary to accomplish His will; but the power of the Spirit is another thing. Now, we are specially called to follow His word, although we may be feeble (see what is said to the church of Philadelphia, Rev. 3).

It is impossible for Christ to fail us in our obedience, and His strength is sufficient for us. Faithful to His word, while we wait for Him in weakness, we shall be pillars in the temple of His God, when He sees the hour of glory. Yet the Holy Ghost dwells in the faithful, sealed with Him by the Father according to His promise.

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