

You Shall Receive Power Till Jesus Comes

by John Piper

Jesus promises the disciples that they will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon them, empowering them to be witnesses to all nations until he comes.

Duration: 38:48

Scripture: Psalm 27:14, Acts 1:6-14, Acts 2:21-23

Topics: "Book Of Acts"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes four key elements of the mission of spreading the word of God. Firstly, the goal of the mission is to start from Jerusalem and reach the ends of the earth. Secondly, the people involved in this mission are to be witnesses. Thirdly, the Holy Spirit will come upon them to empower their witness. Lastly, there will be power for this witness through the Holy Spirit. The speaker refers to Luke 24:47-49 to support these points and highlights the importance of this transitional period between the story of Jesus on earth and the work of the Spirit in the church.

Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from *Desiring God* is available at www.DesiringGod.org Acts chapter 1, reading verses 6 through 14. So when they had come together they asked him, Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? He said to them, It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority.

But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. And you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. And when he had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up.

And a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven, as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven. Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away.

And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon the zealot, and Judas the son of James. All these, with one accord, devoted themselves to prayer,

together with the women and Mary, the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers. Let's pray together.

I think right now, Lord Jesus, of your words, which of you has a son who asks for a loaf of bread, would give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, would give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him? Would you give us the Holy Spirit, Father? Grant that it would come in power, and that he would come in personal fellowship. Grant that my words would not be merely mine, but so taken by the Spirit that they are the words of the living Jesus, who continues to do and to teach after his ascension. Lord Jesus, Holy Spirit, Heavenly Father, commune in our hearts, I pray, your people, and extend your authority and your saving love into the hearts of those right now who do not know you.

I ask it in the name of Jesus for his glory. Amen. Now, there are two volumes.

The Gospel According to Luke is volume number one, and the Acts of the Apostles is volume number two. And in the first volume, O Theophilus, I dealt with all that Jesus began to do and to teach, so that you are to understand that now, in the second volume, I am dealing with what Jesus continues to do and to teach through his Spirit and through his people, as two weeks ago. And then last week, we talked about the baptism with the Holy Spirit.

One of the things that the witnesses need in order to be instruments in the hands of the living Christ. And now today, beginning at verse six, I want us to look at what the disciples thought when they heard this promise of the baptism with the Holy Spirit, and then how Jesus slightly corrected them, and what the implications of this correction are for us. Here's their response in verse six, after he promises that in a few days they're going to be baptized with the Holy Spirit.

They say, Lord, does that mean that you will at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? Now, why did they ask that? That was a very good question. This was not a foolish question. Because they knew their Old Testament.

They knew their Old Testament. And in the Old Testament, it was plainly taught that when the Holy Spirit is poured out, Israel is going to be restored and the kingdom is going to come. Let me read for you an example.

Ezekiel 39, 25 and 29. God says, I will restore the fortunes of Jacob and have mercy on the whole house of Israel. I will not hide my face anymore from them when I pour out my Spirit upon the house of Israel, says the Lord God.

Now, if you knew that verse, and along came the Messiah and says, in two weeks or so, I am going to fulfill the promise of the Old Testament and pour out my Spirit upon you. Would you not say, oh, I get it. The kingdom is about to be restored to Israel.

Now, that's not the only reason that was a good question and a good conclusion. The other reason is that just a few weeks earlier at the Lord's Supper, the Last Supper, Jesus had said to them in Luke 22, 29, as the Father has assigned a kingdom to me, so I assign to you, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Well, there it is.

When the kingdom comes, the apostles are going to sit on thrones, they're going to judge the twelve tribes of Israel, there'll be a great restoration of the people of Israel, ungodliness will be banished from Jacob, there will be a great in-gathering, the kingdom will be established, and he says that in just a few days, it's

coming. And so, obviously, they would ask this question. Now, I don't like it to do what I used to do, not thinking very clearly, and read this question and say, these must be real knuckleheads, these guys, real knuckleheads, because they had just come through forty days of seminar on the kingdom of God, it says in verse three.

They'd been instructed on the kingdom, and here they are, just as Jesus is ready to leave them at the end of the seminar, and they ask a question, and I tended to think, oh, that's a dumb question, of course he's not going to restore the kingdom to Israel. That's not a good criticism of these disciples. Jesus does not criticize their restoration theology, not one whiff of criticism of their theology.

In fact, the theology is going to be picked up on in chapter three, verse twenty-one. We'll preach on it in just a few weeks. All Jesus does is look upon them with tenderness and kindness and understanding and say, you just got one inference wrong, namely, the timing.

You're right to think that when the end time Holy Spirit is poured out, which is in fact what's going to happen according to Joel 2, you're right to think that there'll be a great ingathering and a great restoration of the kingdom. You're just wrong to think that it has to happen in a few years, a few weeks, a few months. And he simply says to them in verse seven, it is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by His own authority.

So don't assume that the long-awaited outpouring of the Spirit, when it comes, which it will in just a few days, means that the consummation must happen immediately. Don't assume that. Now, you know why I think they could ask that question after forty days in the seminar? I think Jesus has said almost nothing about timing.

It simply is not ours to know times. There are some things it is just good to be ignorant of, and this is one of them. God loves us and therefore He keeps us in the dark about the times and the seasons.

I think it's a lot like not knowing when you're going to die. That would be very bad information for you to have. Or when your spouse is going to die.

Or when your child is going to die. That is not information we could handle and lead lives that we ought to lead. Nor could we handle knowledge about the times and the seasons and therefore they belong to God who appointed them in His sovereignty and ours is to be ignorant of them.

And that He wanted to stress to them. Theirs is ignorance, His is to know. But He didn't want them to feel like He had popped their bubble.

You know, you can imagine how they would feel. They'd say, Oh, I get it. The Spirit's about to be poured out.

It won't take but a few months or years until the whole thing is done. Israel is restored. We're sitting on our thrones.

We're judging the twelve tribes. The nations have been reached. You're going to do it in just our time, our lifetime.

And He kind of pulls the plug on their enthusiasm. I don't think He meant to do that. In fact, I think that's the meaning of the word but at the beginning of verse 8. I guess, why is this but at the beginning of verse

8? It's a big, strong, adversative.

And the idea is something like this. Now, you've got a lot right, guys. You've got a lot right.

Namely, the Kingdom is coming. The Holy Spirit is coming. Power is going to be outpoured.

There is going to be a great in-gathering. The consummation is on the way. I don't want to pop that bubble or pull that plug.

You just got your timing wrong. But you've got something right. Power is coming.

That's what verse 8 says. You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. And you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria to the end of the earth.

You will be engaged in this great end-time activity of in-gathering. The consummation is on the way. The Kingdom has arrived.

The Spirit will be poured out. Your bubble is not popped. I haven't pulled your plug.

You're right. Preach it. The Holy Spirit is coming.

Go. I think that's the flavor of his correction. It's just a little timing problem that they've got.

And he's not too concerned about that. Now, I want you to see four things in verse 8. And then I want to compare those four things to Luke 24 and ask how they apply to us. Here are the four things.

Number one, the goal of the mission is to start from Jerusalem and get to the end of the earth. That's the goal of the mission till Jesus comes. Second, the people to whom he's talking are to be witnesses.

Third, the Holy Spirit is coming upon them. Fourth, there will be power for that witness by that Holy Spirit. Okay, now keep those four things in your mind.

And if you want to turn with me, let's go to Luke 24, 47 to 49. Now, the reason I'm looking back here at Luke is because the end of volume number one and the beginning of volume number two overlap by 40 days. You realize that? There's a 40 day overlap between the gospel of Luke and the acts of the apostles.

I don't think that's an accident that Luke would tell Theophilus the same thing twice. There's something utterly crucial about this transitional period here that joined the story of Jesus and the story of Jesus. You get it? That joined the story of Jesus on the earth and the story of the spirit of Jesus doing his work in the church.

There's this transition period in which Luke tells the same thing twice. A lot of the same things in that 40 day period. Now, one of the things he tells twice is these four elements from Acts one eight.

So let's look at them by reading verses. Let's see. 47 through 49.

We'll jump in the middle of verse 47, where it says that the apostles are to take or tell repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all the nations. Notice that now all the nations. That's the ends of the earth beginning from Jerusalem.

That's the same thing that was mentioned in Acts one eight. You are witnesses of these things. That's the second thing that was mentioned in Acts one eight witnesses.

And behold, I send the promise of my father upon you. That's the third thing. That's the Holy Spirit.

That's the way he refers to the Holy Spirit in Acts one four and stay in the city until you are clothed with power. That's the fourth thing. So they're all there.

You see them power, Holy Spirit witness mission to the ends of the earth, namely to all the nations. And it's so helpful to see the same thing being told in different words so that we understand, for example, that when it says the mission is to get to the ends of the earth, it is not a merely geographic phenomenon. It is a people group phenomenon as well, because here it says this message must be taken to all the nations.

And you know that nations doesn't mean political city states or things like Russia and America and Argentina and Japan. It means groups of ethno linguistic people. So it's very helpful to see this overlap and have the same thing told in different words.

Now, in both the gospel and acts, the very next thing that happens after these four things are mentioned is the statement that he was taken up from them and a cloud received him out of their sight. See that there in Luke? It says in in Acts 1, 11, that two angels, two men in white garb, which I think we're to understand to be angels in the form of men appeared. And it says men of Galilee.

This is what they said. Men of Galilee. Why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.

Now, what do you see in that verse? I see a kind of time period mentioned. He has gone up into heaven. He has taken a seat at the right hand of the majesty on high until he puts all of his enemies under his feet.

And then he's going to come just like he went. You'll see him. You can touch him.

He'll eat fish. He's going to fish with an open faced reel in Barnesville, Georgia. Right.

He will come on the clouds of heaven. And that period of time is defined for us in Acts 1, 8. What's this period of time all about? It's the time of mission to the ends of the earth. It's a time of testimony.

It's a time of Holy Spirit. It's a time of power. Those four elements characterize the period in which Jesus is gone physically and present spiritually.

Now, here's the question I want to raise. Am I right in saying that the power promised to these first century Christians is a power held out and available to you and me today? Before I answer the question and give a reason for why I hold the answer, I want to clarify something. Namely, that the power I'm talking about is extraordinary power.

I am not talking about ordinary sanctifying power, which all Christians have by virtue of their new birth and by virtue of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. I am talking about something extraordinary that's called in Luke 24, 49, a clothing with power. And that's called in Acts 1, 8, a spirit coming upon, upon you.

I believe this is different and more than the Holy Spirit's indwelling work of sanctification. Now, why do I think that? Let me give you a couple of reasons. If you look up the word clothed with the spirit or clothed with power, that particular metaphor in the Old Testament, I found at least three instances of it.

One in the life of Gideon, who was clothed with the spirit. One in the life of Amasai, clothed with the spirit. One in the life of Zechariah the prophet.

And in every case, it meant an extraordinary coming upon, taking possession of for some act of verbal prophecy or physical demonstration of power. And so the first reason for thinking what is meant by a clothing with power is an extraordinary power is because it's used that way in the Old Testament. My second reason and really the main one is because I think that's what we see in the book of Acts, especially in Acts, chapter two, when it actually happens.

When this spirit comes and they receive this power, you get things like a strong wind, a mighty sound, tongues of fire, miraculous languages, prophecy, exuberant praise and 3000 conversions in one day. I call that extraordinary. I've never seen that.

I've never heard of it any other time in the history of the church where in one day 3000 people are converted. So I think we're talking here something beyond the ordinary indwelling work of the spirit, a coming upon, a clothing with. And now let me step back here and give you an illustration to help.

This seemed to help on Tuesday night with the deacons. We were here until almost midnight talking about these things, Tuesday night. And this was real precious.

And God was there. It was a wonderful meeting. I love those deacons.

One of the joys of my life is the ruling council in this church, the council of deacons. Boy, you were there, weren't you? It was great. You looked sort of bleary-eyed the next morning too.

But here's the illustration I used. I took it from Martin Lloyd-Jones. He said, and here's the question I'm trying to ask.

What's the relationship between ordinary, obedient, faithful, persevering Christian living and this stuff? This baptism, this clothing, this outpouring, this extraordinary thing that I'm talking about now. Here's what Martin Lloyd-Jones said. He said, it's like a little child.

I'm going to take Barnabas for example. Barnabas is still, he's not in here. Don't look for him.

I didn't use this in the first service. He wouldn't mind. But Barnabas still lifts his hand automatically when we're walking together to take my hand.

I don't have to grab it. If we're walking and we're sort of bumping into each other, his hand just kind of goes like that. It's automatic.

So I take his hand and we're walking along and I'm holding his hand and he's holding my hand and it's good. It's good. He's happy.

I'm happy. I love him. He knows I love him.

He's safe. Nobody's going to hurt him while daddy's got his hand. It's good.

And that's the Christian life. It's good. He's not shouting my praises as we cross the bridge, but he's happy.

He likes me. He loves me. He trusts me.

He's my son. I'll take care of him at any cost. And then suddenly, about halfway across the bridge, something comes over me.

And I reach down and I just sweep Barnabas up and I hug him. And I kiss him on the neck. And I say, Barnabas, I love you so much.

And I hold him out like this. He's kind of startled. What in the world's going on? I look him in the eye and say, I am so glad you're my little boy.

I hug him again. I love you. I put him down.

We finish our walk on home. And Lloyd-Jones says, that's the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Now, Barnabas is about to explode, maybe.

All the love fuses in his brain are almost overloaded. And he doesn't know whether to shout or cry. He's so happy.

He feels so full of his daddy. That's Ephesians 3.17. Filled with all the fullness of God. He's so full of his daddy's love that he just wants to jump.

He wants to run. He feels like he might get faint and fall down. He is overcome with this awesome touch of the father's affection.

I think that's a good illustration. 1 Peter 1.8 talks about those who have not seen the Lord and yet love him. Who rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

So there's before the hug. There's happiness. There's contentedness.

There's obedience. There's faithfulness. There's confidence.

There's security. There's a glad relationship. There's love going both ways.

It's good. But every one of us can imagine what would happen if we were swept up that way into the arms of God in the power of the Holy Spirit. We can imagine a joy and a love and an authenticity and an assurance and a reality.

We can imagine that all those little subconscious subterranean uncertainties and fears and doubts and misgivings and emotional inabilities to resonate with God rising to the service and then just being knocked right out of our lives so that there's nothing left there but an absolute pure immediacy of affection for an unmistakable reality face to face in front of us that nobody could question no matter what arguments they brought before us. It's real. And we pass from being an advocate to a witness.

This is one of the illustrations that Lloyd-Jones gave that moved me very deeply a few weeks ago when I first read it. He told of the time when a friend of his was listening to two people give an address on a subject and the person came to Lloyd-Jones and Lloyd-Jones says this shook him to the depths of his being as he related it to the Holy Spirit and to Christianity. The man said, I listened to these two men and one spoke as an advocate and the other spoke as a witness.

And when I read that, I closed my book and I bowed my head and I said, Lord, I think I am a pretty good advocate. People tell me that. I think I can make a case for Christianity.

I think I can marshal arguments and use rhetoric in a way that I can even persuade a few that it's true. I can rally the troops. But Lord, I want so bad to be a witness.

Now, don't press the language too far. Don't say, oh, we're all witnesses. Just try to get the flavor of what I'm saying.

The flavor is an advocate generally is deducing his convictions and sharing his faith by means of logical inferences from propositions and convictions and then trying to persuade others. Get it? A witness is a person who has been so touched, so powerfully, deeply moved by the reality of the living Jesus Christ sweeping their sins away and inhabiting their heart so that there is absolutely no sense of doubt any more than that. There's light outside that window or there's a pulpit here in front of me.

And you speak with the kind of confidence of one who knows who has tasted and seen. I went up into the prayer room. I don't think Nancy would mind me telling you this.

Nancy Blansky came in just before the service and she said that was so important what you said there because I had been wondering how I and many people can be effective for Christ when we don't feel like very gifted advocates. We're not good at marshaling arguments. We don't have on the tip of our tongue five reasons for why Jesus rose from the dead or why the Bible is infallible or, or, or.

But when you said, and I want to say it again now, the ends of the earth are going to be reached by witnesses, not advocates. Now, I believe in the necessity of clearheaded advocacy of Christ and his word, and I am one. Maybe that's why I can't get through to some of the experiences I would like that the way my mind is put together just isn't conducive to it.

But I know that I'm not trying to retuplicate mainly advocates at Bethlehem. I would like to see God create witnesses. I think that's what Jesus is talking about here when he says.

You will be my witnesses when you receive this power. There will be a quality to your life, a depth to your conviction, an absoluteness to your assurance, a height to your joy, a comprehensiveness to your union with me. So that when you open your mouth.

It will be like Stephen. It will be irresistible. Because you will have seen.

And you will be speaking from what you know. As a witness firsthand. Let me ask in closing now the question that I raised.

I haven't even got to it. Is it for us or isn't it? That was the question I've been trying to answer. And this has been a little parenthesis to say it's extraordinary.

And my answer is that it is for us. And here's my main argument. What is offered there in the clothing with power? Luke 24, 49.

The coming upon with power in X18 is for us today is offered to us today. And this is my reason. If you look at the logic, here we are now.

I'm an advocate. If you look at the logic of X18. Would you not agree? That the promise of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is directly connected with the finishing of the Great Commission by reaching the ends of the earth.

You will receive my spirit. You will have extraordinary power. And you will be witnesses, not just to Jerusalem, not just to Judea, not just to Samaria.

But you're going to finish it to the ends of the earth by this power. And it isn't finished yet. And therefore, the promise is not withdrawn.

We have no warrant to withdraw this promise until every last nation or people group or every inch on this globe is touched by the gospel of Jesus Christ. That's my main argument. I could argue from Ephesians 3. I could argue from Acts 2. I could argue from Joel 2. There are many other arguments for why this offer of extraordinary power is still outstanding and available to the church.

But I think that suffices. And chapter 1 verse 14 points us on how to seek it. Namely, they devoted themselves to prayer.

And therefore, I think it's no mistake that in these days God is raising up an awesome movement of prayer around the world. To invite the Lord to fulfill the promise of clothing his people with power so that they can carry the message of repentance and forgiveness of sins to all the nations. And all the people in Minneapolis.

Now, one last thing that was so thrilling to me last night. I posed this question. How does steady state, ordinary, obedient, faithful Christianity relate to the baptism with the Holy Spirit, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the clothing with power? How do these two things that we're talking about relate to each other? And as soon as I wrote that question on my computer, the phone rang.

It was Curtis Fletcher, a youth pastor in Colorado who was in the service last Sunday morning because he was at this Bethel youth ministers gathering. And he said there were six of us in the first service, youth pastors. And we went out to breakfast after we heard you preach and boy, did things pop at our breakfast table talking about the baptism with the Holy Spirit.

And now I'm back in Colorado and things are popping here in my church as I tell people about this and try to get understanding. And here's my main question for you. This is 930 last night.

Just as I typed this question, he said, can I as a youth minister at my church have a valid and God honoring ministry if I have not been baptized with the Holy Spirit? And I just leaped because that was the very question sitting there in front of me on my computer when the phone rang. And I had an answer ready for him. In fact, we talked for half an hour.

The answer is real simple. Yes. And then I talked about Bethlehem just like I did with the deacons on Tuesday night.

I've been here for 10 years and I do not believe we have been baptized with the Holy Spirit. The way I understand this text holding out to us. And what am I to make of my ministry for the last 10 years? I make a lot out of my ministry and your ministry.

God has been here. Steady state, obedient, loving, humble, faithful Christianity is precious and a wonderful gift of grace. And God's been pouring that out on us for all the years that I've been here and many years before that.

And I have talked to numerous ones of you who have said things to me in concern as you hear me plead and long for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in these extraordinary ways. Two or three of you have said, you know, Pastor, when I hear you say that, I feel sometimes like what's happened in my life really doesn't count. Because my life has been turned upside down at Bethlehem.

I can't describe for you what God has done for me at this church. I can't begin to put into words how my life has been changed. And you talk as though you want this extra thing to happen as though maybe what's happened to me isn't anything that counts.

And that's really good for me to hear. Because it's caused me to reflect long and hard about the relationship between this steady state, obedient, faithful, humble, honest, persevering Christianity alongside this extraordinary outpouring that I'm calling for, asking for, pleading for, seeking in my own life. And here's the way I would relate them historically.

Historically, has it not been the case that when God has poured out His Holy Spirit in unusual times of awakening and revival, and He does immediately what's taken years to do, that it's precisely the faithful, the obedient, the plotters, the steady state Christians who have preserved, who have nurtured, who have held in being all the fruit that might have been lost overnight had not there been some real steady, deep, strong, persevering Christians. But here works the other way too. Namely, I believe that while a church is persevering, as I believe we have been persevering, in faithfulness, in obedience, in worship, in mission, in nurture, that God is often plowing the ground, watering the soil, sowing the seed, so that in the day of His appointment the Holy Spirit may fall in an extraordinary way, and something will happen overnight what has not happened in ten years of ministry.

I mean, how many people can we count that the Lord has clearly and decisively brought from darkness into light. So I hope that all you children who are walking with your hands in your Father will not feel put upon if I say, wouldn't it be nice if He swept us up? Wouldn't it be alright? I don't have any predictions of what it might look like. I said to the first service, I suspect that given my personality, my orientation on the Word of God, all of your particular personalities and why you've come to Bethlehem, and just the psychological mix of this church, if the Holy Spirit were to fall on us, and we were to be clothed with power, it wouldn't look like anybody else in particular.

It would just be God's unique work here. And I think God is always going to do His work in such a way that nobody will be able to take credit for it. It'll mix us up every time.

It won't be because I on some particular day said the right thing, or prayed the right prayer, or waited the right amount of time. It's always going to come in a way that it sort of shows that it came through prayer, and sort of shows that it was free from prayer. And He is totally sovereign to do as He pleases.

So really my goal this morning is to just lay it out in such a way as you can really believe God is at work in your lives, even though you have not been baptized by the Holy Spirit, and therefore being free to love your Father and keep walking with your hand in His hand. You can be whispering to yourself, well I hope Daddy picks me up this afternoon, like He did last time. Let's pray.

Father in Heaven, we long to be baptized with the Holy Spirit. And if people would prefer that I not call it that, let them then just drop that word. We long to be clothed with power from on high.

We long to receive the Pentecostal outpouring that is promised until the mission is complete. And so Lord, in your time and in your way for this particular people and this particular pastor, have mercy. I believe that I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

Wait for the Lord, be strong, and let your heart take courage. Yes, wait for the Lord. And all the people said, Amen.

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