

The Old Time Pathway to Power

by Victor Maxwell

The sermon emphasizes the importance of looking back at the basics and observing the founding principles of the early church to discover their secret to effectiveness and accomplishment.

Scripture: John 14:16, Acts 1:8, Acts 2:36, Romans 10:9, Ephesians 1:22, Philippians 3:21, Hebrews 6:19, 1 Peter 1:8

Topics: "Church Effectiveness", "Holy Spirit"

Description

Victor Maxwell preaches on 'The Old Time Pathway to Power' using the illustration of the Crystal Palace Exhibition to highlight the importance of churches being both energetic and effective, unlike the Prize-winner that did not do anything. He emphasizes the need for churches to look back at the early church in Acts to discover the founding principles of effectiveness and accomplishment, focusing on the equipment, enduement, and excitement of Christ's ascension. Maxwell stresses the significance of being witnesses for Christ, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the urgency of fulfilling the great commission.

Transcript

The Church in Action #2 The Old Time Pathway to Power Acts 1:1-12 When the Crystal Palace Exhibition opened in 1851 people flocked to London's Hyde Park to behold the marvels of the latest invention. Back in those days steam was the in thing. There were steam ploughs, steam trains, steam looms, steam organs. The Exhibition's first prize that year went to a marvellous contraption that was made up for seven thousand parts. When the heat was up and the pressure right, they turned it on and everything began to move.

The gears engaged, wheels turned, pulleys ran back and forward, bells rang and whistles blew. The noise was tremendous, the sight was awesome. Thousands flocked to see it. There was only one draw back - it didn't do anything. It had no practical use. It was only a demonstration on the uses and ability of steam. There was an abundance of energy but it was not put to any effect. That perhaps is a fitting illustration of many churches today. There may be lots of activity, everything is well organised, the proper sounds are made and every department runs clock work but there is one big drawback - it is the same as the Crystal Palace Prize-winner - it doesn't do anything.

There is function without accomplishment. This was not the case with the first century church in Acts. You can't read this account without realising these early Christians were both energetic and effective. I remember when I trying to teach my wife how to drive apart from nearly ending the divorce courts, one of the first things the new driver is taught is to make sure he looks back both in the mirror and over the

shoulder before you move forward. That is also an important principle for a church to learn; for us to move forward it is essential to look back and see God's pathway to power.

The church of early Acts had no financial resources nor any great learned or noble men amongst them. They faced the imperial might of the Roman Empire, the sophistication of the Greek culture and the fanatical bigotry of Judaism and yet they did so much with so little. Today we have so much and do so little with so much. To discover and learn their secret it important for us to look back at the basics and observe the founding principles of their effectiveness and accomplishment.

The Equipment For the Church Acts 1-5 The task facing the disciples of our Lord was "Mission Impossible" when measured against their human resources. They needed the forty day period following the resurrection of the Saviour to equip them for that assignment.(a) Jesus gave precepts to instruct them. 1:2,4 "He had given commandments unto the apostles whom He had chosen". This post resurrection ministry of our Lord to His disciples was vital. The Gospel writers give us an indication of these commands.

Matthew and Mark show that Jesus gave the great commission with an emphasis on the extent of the Mission on earth.(Mt. 28:16-20 Mark 16:14-16) In Luke's account He gave the great commission with emphasis on the content of the message in the Scriptures.(Luke 24:36-53) In John's Gospel the great commission was given with emphasis on the character of the messenger in his heart. (John 20, 21) The Saviour's commands to his disciples during the post resurrection days majored on their worship, their walk and their witness in the world and waiting for the promised Holy Spirit. (b) Jesus gave proofs of the resurrection of the Saviour to convince them. 1:3 The disciples not only needed instructions they also needed convictions.

They needed to be absolutely convinced that Jesus Christ had risen and was alive. The resurrection is at the heart of the gospel. (Rom 10:9) Jesus Christ gave to them undeniable proofs of His resles to disbelief but with forty days of intermittent appearances they would not be easily fooled. He gave them Audible proofs - "speaking of the things..". For three years they had listened to the ministry of our Lord. After He was risen it was more of the same. (c) Jesus gave the promise of unction of the Holy Spirit to assure them. 1:5 With the great commission our Lord had given His disciples many promises.(Mt. 28:18-20) He now spoke of the promise of the Father.

What was that promise It was the advent of the Holy Spirit. This was not the origin of the Holy spirit's activity. Prior to Pentecost the Holy Spirit had been operative in the world. The Holy Spirit was active in creation.(Gen. 1:2) The Holy Spirit authored the Holy Scriptures.(2Peter 1:21) The Holy Spirit anointed individuals for specific tasks.(Ex. 31:3) The Holy Spirit was the Agent in our Saviour birth, life, ministry, death and resurrection. His advent was essential for the accomplishment of the Lord's work.

The promise of the Father was prophesied by Joel (Joel 2:28-32) The promise of the Father was proclaimed by John the Baptist. (Luke 3:16) The promise of the Father was promised also by our Lord Jesus. He had already spoken of it in the upper Room ministry prior to His death. He taught them that the Holy Spirit would be given to indwell them;(John 14:16,17) to enlighten them; (John 16:13) to energise them and to encourage them. Believers need the Holy Spirit to enable them in their worship, in their witness, in their wedded life, in their working life and their warfare with Satan. (Eph. 5:18-6:16) This promise was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. (Acts 2:1-4) The promise of the advent of the Holy Spirit was accompanied with a command to wait at Jerusalem.

This promise and command has been lifted out of the context and caused some confusion in the minds of some. Regarding the waiting it should be pointed out that it is doubtful if these Galileans would have returned to Jerusalem without the Lord's command. They had been persecuted there. There also was a specific waiting time and in a very definite place. They were to wait in Jerusalem and not depart until the Holy Spirit came. They waited exactly as they had been commanded. Upon His coming they were all baptized by the Holy Spirit even as Jesus Christ promised.

This baptism by the Holy Spirit is referred to on five occasions in the Scriptures. Three times the words are attributed to John the Baptist, once to our Lord and once by Paul. On each occasion it was in relation to the being baptised into His body. This is explained for us in 1 Cor. 12:12,13 where Paul shows that all believers are baptised into one body by the same Holy Spirit. Nowhere in Scripture are we commanded to wait for the promise of the Father. That promise was already fulfilled on the day of Pentecost.

Nowhere in Scripture are we commanded to seek to be baptised by the Holy Spirit. The promise of baptism by the Holy Spirit happens to the believer when he is brought into the mystical body of Jesus Christ. Many believers claim to have definite experiences of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Much terminology is used to describe these experiences. Two things are essential: first validate that the experience is genuinely of the Holy Spirit. Secondly, use Bible terminology for that which is genuine.

Peter and other disciples were repeatedly filled with the Holy Spirit but on only one occasion in their lives do we read that they were baptized by the Holy Spirit. These very human disciples were mistakenly taken up with the possible establishing of the Kingdom. Our Saviour corrected their thoughts and gave the blueprint for what is still the only pathway to power in our day. Like these disciples we also need to be taken up with the task that is our immediate responsibility rather than speculate on that which is the authority of the Father. (See also 1:11) Francis Dixon, pastor at Lansdowne Baptist Church for many years, told an amazing story.

He was on a mission trip to India and one night in a fellowship meeting a lady related her conversion through a tract given to her on the streets of Sydney, Australia. Some time later he was on another trip to the West Indies and another Christian worker giving testimony said they had been converted through a gospel tract given to him on the streets of Sydney. It was more than co-incidence when the pastor visited the north of England and yet again heard some one relate about their conversion through a piece of literature given to them in Sydney.

The pastor told the story at his own church and after the service two other people came to tell the preacher they also had been converted through the witness of tracts given on the streets in Sydney. In the course of events Francis Dixon was invited to preach in Perth, Australia. After the meetings he went on to Sydney and prayed that the Lord would let him meet this mighty soul winner on the streets whose name he had ascertained. He searched for a while in vain until he was standing looking in at a shop window.

Suddenly there was a tug on his sleeve and when Francis Dixon looked round an old man offered the English preacher a tract. Francis Dixon graciously received it and then asked the name of the distributor. It was his man. The preacher began to recount to the man the various testimonies he had heard. The old saint began to cry and said, "For twenty-five years I have been giving out tracts on these streets and never heard of one person converted. Someone has well said that "The chief duty of every Christian is to win souls!" 1.

John Wesley said to his students one day, "You have only one business, and that is the salvation of souls". 2 David Brainard, at the close of his life wrote in his diary, "I cared not how I lived nor what hardships I went through, if I only might gain souls for Christ". 3 F. B. Meyer, speaking once to a group at Northfield, said, "Gentlemen, reckon your ministry a failure unless souls are won to Christ". 4. Adrian Rogers said, "There are two types of Christians; souls winners and backsliders." 5.

Dr. R. A. Torrey said, "I would like to ask what right does a man have to call himself a follower of Jesus Christ if he is not a soul-winner" Some of these may seem to be extreme. We recognise that the winning of souls and work of conversion is only by the operation of the Holy Spirit. However, we dare not underestimate the importance the Lord Jesus put on the winning of the lost. Sadly the great commission to the Church has become the great omission in the Church. To have a Christian or a church that does not witness is like having a light that does not shine, a spring that does not flow, a seed that does not grow.

Here in Acts 1 our Saviour again gives the charge to His gathered disciples. 2. The Enduement on the Church 1:6-8 (a) The people God chooses. - ""whom He had chosen...shall be witnesses..."(1:2,8) Our blessed Lord had hand picked His disciples. Our Lord did not choose angels to do this work. They were not given the honour. Take a look at the early disciples. (1:13,14) They were all ordinary men and women like ourselves. Not one of them had been trained in the great theological schools of that day.

Like us some of them had recently failed miserably, others were new converts and some were ladies. All whom He had chosen were enlisted to be witnesses. Follow through the Book Acts and you will find that those who tasted of His grace testified of that same grace. Likewise God has enlisted all of us to be witnesses for Him. (b) The plan God uses - "Witnesses unto Me" Acts 1:8 is not only the key text of the book but witness is the key word in Acts. It occurs 29 times either to describe an activity or as a pronoun.

As seen by the contrast between verses 7 and 8 Our Lord indicated to them that they were to be witnesses in the present rather than prophets for the future. To be a witness is very personal. Mark the pronouns in Acts 1:7,8 and see each one was a witness. It is not just the witness of the Church or the witness of the preacher. It must be a person who has personal experience of that to which he witnesses. I remember witnessing a kidnap in Belfast. I volunteered to speak up because no one else had seen what had happened.

I was the witness. To be a witness is plain. It is the responsibility of the saved to tell it like it is, what we have seen, what we have heard and what we have experienced. The blind man of John 9 was a witness to what Jesus did for him. John 9:25 "One thing I know, once I was blind but now I see." To be a witness is not just verbal is also very practical. It is a witness unto Christ. while it is good to use your lips for the Saviour it is equally important if not more so, to make your life witness for Jesus Christ.

What we are is more important than what we say. To be a witness is very serious. The root of the word is that of a "martyr". These were all witness of Christ and some ended up in prison for the Lord for whom they witnessed and even there they witnessed. (Phil. 1:13) so many died that the word witness came to mean martyr. Today god calls us to yield our bodies as living sacrifices unto Him. We are not commissioned to build the Church. That is our Lord's work. It is a sad statistic today that tells us that only 5% of Christians ever witness for their Lord.

During the reign of Oliver Cromwell, the British government ran low on the silver used to make coins. So Cromwell sent his men to a local cathedral to search for some: They reported back to him that the only silver they could find was in the statues of the Saints standing in the corners. Cromwell sent back word,

"Good; let's melt down the Saints and put them back into circulation". That's what we need; men and women who have been melted down, filled with God's Spirit and put back into circulation.

What good is our experience. if we keep it in the church. enjoy it in the church and leave it in the church
(c) The Person God exalts - unto Me. The Holy Spirit is come to speak of Jesus Christ. We do not witness to our church nor to our denomination. It is not to a theological position. The witnesses are also to speak of Christ. Jesus Christ was the theme of their preaching, the chief substance writing and the sole motive for their living. They were witnesses to His life - all that Jesus began to do and to teach.(1:1,2) They were witnesses to His death - His passion. (Acts 1:3) They were witnesses to His resurrection.

Acts 1:4 They would soon to be witnesses to His ascension. They would soon to be witnesses to the reality of the Holy Spirit in their lives Their witness was all about Christ. We need to adopt the motto of the apostle Paul, we preach not ourselves but Christ Jesus and Him crucified. The places God reaches - This was perhaps the pattern Luke was using to write this book of Acts. However, the ever widening circle of gospel witness and influence reflects God passion for the world, God's plan for the church and principle God still uses for the work.

"Jerusalem and Judea - local evangelism", We all have our Jerusalem. Our town our area. Samaria - provincial evangelism. This is the intermediate distance and perhaps brought into focus that the Gospel goes beyond our narrow concepts which are often moulded by our own culture. In John 4 the disciples were horrified that the Lord Jesus spoke to a woman of Samaria. The uttermost ends of the earth - global evangelism". This means that while some may stay at home to witness others must be prepared to leave home and go distant from home to different climes and cultures with different languages and thus fulfil the great commission.

Not all went to the end of the earth but some went. God sent some and scattered others. (d) The power God promises. - "Ye shall receive the promise.. ye shall receive power". Before the Holy spirit came the disciples did not know power. When He came they were packed with power. Without the Holy Spirit our witness will be cold, ineffective and sterile. Peter, Stephen, Philip and Paul were all filled with the Holy Spirit as they witnessed. As Jesus Christ was present among us in His physical body and all that He did He did by the Holy Spirit, so today He is present in His mystical body and still works by the same Holy Spirit.

We are but the witnesses of the gospel. He is the power of the gospel. By the Holy Spirit ordinary people did extra-ordinary things. We are but the glove, lifeless and powerless of our selves. When He enters and fills us then we have both life and power through the activity of His hand. We all need to know His fullness. Remember the Holy Spirit is a person. Remember the Holy Spirit is present. Remember the Holy Spirit is powerful Remember the Holy Spirit's mission is to glorify Jesus Christ. (e) The period God gives - "When He had spoken these things...This same Jesus will come again".

Starting from that day the responsibility of the church has been to fulfil that command. As generation succeeds generation the torch of truth must be carried to the ends of the earth until the end of the age. The work of the gospel is not only important it is also urgent. Luke gave us some pictures of running that underline the urgency of the Gospel. Zachaues came running to Christ because of His need. (Luke 19:4) The Father of the prodigal went running to his son because of His love.(Luke 15:20) Philip went running with the Gospel because of the opportunity and urgency.(Acts 8:29,30) The Excitement of Christ's Ascension 1:9-11 A mother marvelled one day to see her son pushing the lawn mower to cut the long

grass on their lawn.

She asked the father how did he got Johnny to cut the lawn. "I told him the keys of the car were lost in the long grass". Motivation is the greatest force in Christian work. The Christian has many motives; the love of Christ constrains us, the lateness of the hour challenges us, the coming of our Saviour challenges us. A tourist was travelling along the shore of Lake Como in northern Italy. At the Villa Asconati, the friendly gardener opened the gate and showed him the grounds which the old man kept in perfect order.

The tourist asked him when the owner of the castle had last been there. "Twelve years ago", the gardener answered. The tourist replied, "But you keep this garden in such fine condition, just as though you expected your master to come tomorrow". The gardener promptly replied, "Today, sir, today!" He knew his master would return personally. There are three great motives given in these verses before us. The promise of the Holy Spirit enabled them to witness with power. The parting of the Saviour in a cloud encouraged them to walk by faith.

The promise of the angels entitled them to wait in blessed hope for the soon coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Reflecting on your life and times, what would you consider to have been your most thrilling experience Undoubtedly, these are thrilling days in which we live. However, if you were given the opportunity to select a limited period of another age, what period would you go for How about the six week span that surrounded our Saviour's Passion, Burial, Resurrection and Ascension I can think of no stretch of time since the six days of Creation that were so crammed with such momentous events.

It is upon these historical and factual events that the Christian Gospel is based. Like rungs in Jacob's ladder ascending to heaven, we firmly hold faith in Christ's Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension and Second Advent. Today we are living between the last two of these events like living in a valley between two alpine peaks - The Grand Ascension and the Glorious Appearing. From the mountain of Grace to the mountain of Glory: Both these peaks shine through in our study today.

Is it any wonder that we find these disciples gazing 1. Looking at the ascension of our Lord. The ascension of our Lord is a theme we often over look. (a) His Departure - How He went. i. He went suddenly and supernaturally. The power of the grave could not hold Him and the power of gravity could not detain Him. He was received up into glory. ii. He went bodily. He came into the world as the Son of God. He left this world as the Son of Man. He stepped out of eternity and took upon Himself flesh and blood now He ascends back into the great eternity with a glorified body.

There is a man in the glory and one day he will transform these mortal bodies to be like His glorified body. Phil 3:21 iii. He went visibly. His ascension needed to be visible. The moment of His resurrection was hidden from human view but not His ascension. Although they lost sight of Him they had to learn to walk by faith that He never lost sight of them. clouds may still hide Jesus Christ but we still walk by faith that He lives in heaven for us. (b) His Destination. - Where He went.

Just some weeks prior to this our Saviour's triumphant entered into Jerusalem when He descended the Mount of Olives and entered in by the Golden gate. Then they cried their hosannas to our Lord and would have made Him King. Here we have the triumphant exit of our Saviour out of Jerusalem when on the same Mount of Olives He ascended up to heaven as the glorified Saviour. At the entrance He was going to the cross Now He is going to the crown At the entrance He was going to the thorns Now He is going to the throne At the entrance He was going to be scorned Now He is going to the singing At the entrance He was going to be lifted up Now He is going to sit down At the entrance He was going to be crucified Now He

is going to be glorified At the entrance He was going atone for sin Now He is going to mediate for sinners
At the entrance He was going to be lifted up Now He is going to sit down.

At the entrance He was going to be our Substitute Now He is going to be our Advocate (c) His Dispensation. - What He is doing. i. Jesus Christ entered heaven as our Lord Three times our Lord was offered a crown. The Devil offered Him the Kingdoms of this world in the Wilderness if He would bow down and worship him. At Jerusalem the people tried to make Him King but he refused their acclaim. In the ascension God the Father crowned Him both Lord and Christ. ii Jesus Christ entered heaven as our Intercessor.

When Jesus ascended to heaven there was nothing more to do on earth. His work was finished. His heavenly ministry as advocate and Intercessor began. Our blessed Lord was always a man of prayer. He prayed in many places. In the fields, on the streets, in the garden, on the mountain, in houses and in the temple, but now He ever lives to intercede for us at the right hand of God. Thirty years of living, three years of teaching, one tremendous act of dying and now more than two thousand years of praying.

He is praying for us just now. Murray McCheyne said "If we could hear Jesus praying for us in the next room we would fear nothing". He prays for us in heaven now. iii Jesus Christ entered in as our forerunner Whether we enter heaven by the clay or by the cloud, by death or by the rapture, we can be sure Jesus Christ has gone before us. He died, He is the firstfruits of the resurrection, He ascended up to heaven. Because He had an ascension we also shall have an ascension on that day when we hear the shout of the archangel and trumpet of God.

See Heb 6:19-20; 9:24 Jesus has made full atonement and by his own blood He has entered in for us. iv Jesus Christ entered in as the Victor Because of Calvary Jesus Christ is the Victor. He triumphed over death and He conquered the grave. As the mighty Victor He ascended into heaven. Psalm 24; Eph. 4:10-12 [D] His Dominion - How He rules. God has exalted Him both Lord and Christ. Acts2:36; He has been made the Glorious Head of the Church. Eph.1:22,23; He is the Great Lord over all things. IPet.3:22; 2.

Learning about the advent of our Lord. As the disciples gazed up to heaven they were undoubtedly looking for the re-appearance of the Saviour. Two men stood by them - some think that these were Moses and Elijah - and commented, "Ye men of Galilee why stand you here gazing in to heaven..". The heavenly visitors assured them that the Saviour would return but this was not the time to be gazing - it was time to be going. (a) The remembrance of Christ's command The unknown visitors reminded the disciples to obey God's command: To go to Jerusalem as He commanded.

To go to the prayer meeting and wait as He commanded. To go into all the world and preach as He commanded (b) The assurance of Christ's coming again. The parallels between His Ascension and Advent are very striking: In His Ascension it was the same Jesus - the Jesus who loved the lost, wept for the hurting and died on the cross. The same Lord Himself shall appear. We did not see Him but we shall see the same Lord. His Ascension was certain so also He shall surely come His Ascension was sudden so also He shall come suddenly His Ascension was physical so also He shall come bodily His ascension was personal so also He shall come personally His ascension was visible so also He shall come visibly.

Peter was one of the company that day who saw the Lord ascend vertically and clouds received him out of their sight. Later he wrote, "Whom having not seen ye love, in whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory". 1 Peter 1:8 Jesus is coming! Sound the glad

word! Coming for those He redeemed by His blood, Coming to reign as the glorified Lord! Jesus is coming again. Jesus is coming! The promise is true; Who are the chosen, the faithful, the few, Waiting and watching, prepared for review Jesus is coming again!

A boy held the string of his kite and helped it dance with the wind in the sky above. As he held it a low cloud obscured the sight of the kite but the lad kept hold on the string. A passer by saw the young fellow holding the string but when he looked up all he could see were clouds. He said to the lad, "What are you holding" "A kite!" replied the boy. "How do you know it is there" questioned the man. "Because I can feel the tug of it in my hand". We also know that Jesus is in heaven for we can feel Him tug on our hearts.

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