

**The Weekly Word**  
April 20-26, 2015

The story of the first disciples living out Jesus' command is our reading for the next few weeks, Happy reading...  
Grace and Peace, Bill

To hear the Bible read click this link... <http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/audio/>.

**Monday, April 20: Acts 1- Jesus' last words...**

If someone walked up to you and asked, "What were Jesus' last words while he was on earth?" How would you respond?

I'm pretty sure that before today I would have responded with the great commission at the end of Matthew's gospel. *Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* (Mt 28:18-20).

However, I realized during my reading this morning that I was wrong. The last words spoken by Jesus, before he left us and returned to heaven, are found in Acts 1:7-8: *"It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

The Matthew and Acts statements are not unrelated but they are different. Jesus' last words in Matthew's Gospel focus on the task Jesus leaves for His followers. But Jesus' actual last words focus on the power necessary for us to complete the task! Both are important. But Jesus' last words tells us about the power we will need to do what He has left us to do.

We cannot complete the task of telling the world about Jesus without the power of the Holy Spirit upon us, within us and working through us! Luke uses the rest of Acts to show us how essential the Spirit is in the lives of believers.

Understanding God, the Holy Spirit, is not merely a 'theological' pursuit. Understanding God, the Holy Spirit, and how He works in the lives of believers is essential to completing the task Jesus has given His church. The Spirit was given so we can be Jesus' witnesses to the ends of the earth.

Do you know God the Holy Spirit? Are you listening for His leading as you participate in God's commission to reach the world with the message and saving grace of Jesus?

Think about it...

*O, God, the Holy Spirit, open my eyes more clearly to how You work... how You work in me so that I may be more attuned and more obedient to You... so that the world will know Jesus is Lord. Amen.*

**Tuesday, April 21: Acts 2- And the power comes...**

Acts 2 is the fulfillment of Jesus' final words from chapter 1. The power of the Holy Spirit comes upon the disciples. Reading the opening account (1-13), I noticed a few things.

1- All of the people in the upper room spoke in tongues. If the comment from Acts 1 still stands true, then the 'all' was something in the order of 120 people, who we know

included men and women and likely various ages as well. What a picture of how the church should operate. All of us empowered by God leading the charge, advancing the kingdom as God empowers us!

- 2- They became witnesses. The Spirit's outpouring was for witness as Jesus' words in Acts 1:8 declare. People from around the world heard the message for the first time.
- 3- God's miracle that day was people hearing the message of Jesus in their native or heart language. Heart language is a powerful communicator. People understand best when they hear the message in their native language. Native or heart language is the language of the heart. It can go to deeper places more quickly and more accurately than any second language. This miracle goes to show how loving God is...

I am touched this morning by the love of the Lord for people and the extremes God went to in order to reach a lost and disconnected world and bring them to Himself.

And on a personal level, I am overcome by a deep sense that I have still so far to go in my transformation to gain a heart as compassionate and out-reaching with love as the Lord has...

*Lord, release in me not only Holy Spirit power but also Holy Spirit love and Holy Spirit boldness and Holy Spirit creativity to reach out in Jesus' name. And to touch people in their heart not just their mind for the sake of the kingdom and with the love You, God, have for them. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

### **Wednesday, April 22: Acts 3- Witness continues...**

In Acts 1:8 Jesus said to the disciples, *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.* Yesterday we read about the power of the Holy Spirit coming upon the disciples. Witnesses immediately ensued.

Today the story of the disciples witness continues. A lame beggar is healed miraculously and immediately Peter seized the opportunity to witness to Jesus.

In the book of Acts, 'witness' is generally public declaration of the message of Jesus.

On Solomon's Colonnade, the porch of the Temple, Peter begins declaring the message of Jesus to all who gathered because of the miracle. The scene will continue to unfold in the next chapter.

For too many years I focused on the miracle healing. It is amazing what God can do. But if I step back and look at the arc of the story, as Luke penned it, the miracle was the crowd-gathering event that set the expectation into which Peter stepped for the main act... witnessing to Jesus and inviting others to turn from their wicked ways and follow Jesus!

Increase my boldness to seize any and every moment to witness to Jesus inviting others to turn from their wicked ways and follow Him... this is what God is speaking to me today!

How about you???

*Lord, loosen my lips that I might proclaim Jesus clearly, boldly and decisively... for Your glory. Amen.*

### **Thursday, April 23: Acts 4- Seize the moment...**

The miracle and witness to Jesus caused such a stir that the religious leaders had Peter and John jailed. Do the threats and jailing shut them up? No way.

At the first possible moment the duo continue their witness to Jesus. And in the midst of this hostile crowd they do not temper the message one bit.

*Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are*

*being asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. Jesus is 'the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.' Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved" (8-12)*

Direct and clear, Peter does not mince words.

I pondered what allowed him to be so fearless? It is not simply that he knew facts. Knowing facts, even knowing the person Jesus, doesn't guarantee relentless boldness and courage under fire. After all, this same man caved under the scrutiny of a maid on the night Jesus was arrested.

I could come up with only two reasons.

First, Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit. Luke makes this clear. So far at each juncture where Peter witnesses to Jesus, Luke expressly says he was filled with the Spirit. And according to Jesus in Acts 1:8 the filling of the Spirit, no matter the attending manifestations, is given so that believers have power to witness. Peter is living proof of this in Acts.

Second, Peter was sold out to the mandate to tell everyone from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth the salvation message of Jesus. He wasn't just looking for friends to tell the Jesus message. If you walked and talked and would listen, he would tell you. It didn't matter if he knew you or didn't. If he felt threatened or didn't. Peter was sold out to the mandate... witness, tell the world!

The recognition came... "Bill, that's what I want from all My followers."

God fills us... we offer our lives to the cause. This is the formula for the Christian faith.

Think about it...

*O God, use me... embolden me... for the sake of the message. Amen.*

### **Friday, April 24: Acts 5- God knows...**

In the dramatic account of Ananias and Sapphira, I heard God's reminder that God knows, God hears. The story is a frightening one and clearly from Luke's pen, the people of the church 'were seized with great fear' too.

Ananias and Sapphira conspire to lie. No one else knows, or so they think. But as they execute their plan for recognition and honor, their lie is exposed publically and they drop dead.

My heart wrestles with many questions, why would God do this and so on. I leave them on the table for now as I consider more personal issues...

God hears their conversations. God understand their intentions. I am stopped in my tracks. God knows! Oh, I affirm that truth theologically in my head. God is omniscient, God knows everything. But seeing that God knows and can judge immediately if He chooses, takes a distant theological statement and makes it real and impactful.

When I consider doing 'sin-filled' things...when I lie, cheat or steal, God knows. He really and honestly knows and He could choose to exact my punishment right there on the spot.

When I think about these things... my heart is seized with fear. A healthy fear that reminds me God is so much bigger and so far beyond me that I fall before God in praise and adoration.

I also realize how much grace God shows me on a regular basis. I, any of us, could be the next Ananias or Sapphira...

*Lord God, questions still rumble. Why did You treat them like this and not others... not me? But even my questions cause me to realize that You are so much greater and Your ways so far beyond me that I fall at Your feet in worship and praise and pray...*

*I cry with Isaiah, 'Your ways are higher than my ways'....*

*Blessed be Your name, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.*

### **Saturday, April 25: Acts 6- Keep the movement going...**

Luke regularly inserts a comment about the growth of the church. In chapter 6 he writes, *So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith (7).*

I found myself drawn to this verse and the detail that *a large number of priests became obedient to the faith*. Why add this notation about priests, I wondered.

Priests were 'set apart' people. They ministered in the temple; they lived by extra devout rules. One could say they were guardians of the Hebrew faith. Priests were religious insiders and by noting that priests, *a large number of priests*, were coming to faith in Jesus gave Christ-followers a level of legitimacy.

Those who study mission explain that for Christianity to truly take root in a new people, group or culture, some insiders and respected people from that culture, especially leaders, need to become believers. And when these insiders/respected people come to faith, the door opens wide for others to come to faith.

This seems to be the case here. When priests come to faith, it shouts, 'This new faith is okay'. And this is a huge event in the spread of the church.

Also, this small detail helps confirm that people of every station of life were becoming obedient to the faith...rich, poor; men, women; priests, lay; old, young... the message of Jesus was for everyone! And it still is today.

God whispered... "Keep the movement going. Tell God's story to anyone and everyone. Invite people to faith in Jesus and rejoice when they become obedient to me."

What an encouragement that we still have much work to do in letting the world know that Jesus is the way of salvation.

*Lord, I pray for myself that I would become better at sharing Jesus with others, people I know and people around the world to whom You send me. I pray for my church, that we would grow better at sharing Jesus with our community and world. I pray, Lord, for the entire Church, Your Church around the world, that we all would get on board with Your mandate and set our hearts on reaching the world and every people of the world with Your message... the way of salvation through Jesus Christ, the Lord. Amen.*

### **Sunday, April 26, 2015, Sunday Worship**

*If any of my thoughts or the Bible readings spark questions send an email reply and I will do my best to answer all questions from people on the list... I will answer personal questions privately; general questions will be answered in a subsequent email installment.*

*If you are reading along with me from the PCOG website you can send questions or request being placed on the weekly email list by emailing Lisa at [office@pcogonline.org](mailto:office@pcogonline.org).*

Click here for a link to my sermons on the web. Sermons are generally posted within 2 days.