

Journey with Jesus to be ON MISSION with GOD

(Shared by Tom & Alberta Ecker)

Ministry and Mission in the Spirit by Dan Rogers – What did it look like as the NT church began to participate in God’s mission and what can the disciples of Jesus today learn from their story?

In this message we will begin a survey of **Acts 1-13** and note timeless principles of how the Church is God’s chosen instrument for sharing the gospel and making disciples of Jesus.

What does participating in the love and life of Jesus look like? What does participation in the mission of the Father, through the ministry of Jesus, in the power of the Holy Spirit look like? It looks like disciples of Jesus who are multiplying more disciples, leaders and churches.

Acts 1:6-8

⁶ So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" ⁷ He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ 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."

In **Acts 2:1** on Pentecost the disciples were gathered in a room. Scripture says there were about 120 disciples (**Acts 1:15**). Did the number at this gathering include the 11 Apostles or were they a separate number, making a gathering of 131 disciples. Some people think there could have been upward of 500 people there. Nevertheless, they were there because Jesus told them to remain in Jerusalem until they received power from on high. The Greek word for power is the word **dúnamis**:

δύναμις dúnamis; genitive *dunámeōs*, fem. noun from *dúnamai*, to be able. Power, especially achieving power. All the words derived from the stem *dúna-* have the meaning of being able, capable. It may even mean to will.

They would receive power to do something, to achieve something. What did Jesus say they would do once they received this power? They would be witnesses! Have you ever watched Perry Mason? He usually will cross examine someone who is sitting in the "witness box." What does the witness do? The witness is there to testify. He or she testifies to what they have seen, what they have heard (you have to get around a hearsay defense for that) and they testify to what they have experienced. The point is, they witness and testify. These Apostles and disciples were special eye witnesses to the life and the words of Jesus. And he was sending the Spirit from the Father to enable them to witness and testify. Begin to think about the following questions: Beginning where? Why there? Where else?

Have you ever met the risen Lord? You can actually say, yes! Not that any of us has seen him with our physical eyes, but in our spiritual reality we see Jesus as our friend, our best friend, Jesus is with each one of us all the time. As our friend he's never there to condemn us but to always encourage us. We can all witness to his presence and friendship, to his encouragement to do better. Jesus is my best friend; he is there for me and with me.

After Pentecost something finally registered with the disciples. Let's reference **Isaiah 43:10-13** from which we will see that **Acts 2** restyles and updates the Pentecost experience in the Israel story. ¹⁰ ***"You are my witnesses," declares the LORD, "and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me. ¹¹ I, even I, am the LORD, and apart from me there is no savior. ¹² I have revealed and saved and proclaimed— I, and not some foreign god among you. You are my witnesses," declares the LORD, "that I am God. ¹³ Yes, and from ancient days I am he. No one can deliver out of my hand. When I act, who can reverse it?"***

In the book of **Luke chapter 24** Jesus brings the fulfillment and understanding of the prophecy in Isaiah to the disciples, **(48)** "You are witnesses of these things," these things were the things he spoke from **verse 44 to 49, notice verse 45** "Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures (which meant the O.T. Scriptures including Isaiah). Jesus clearly gives them the mandate to be his witnesses and to testify. Let's look at **Luke 24:44-49**:

44 He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." 45 Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. 46 He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, 47 and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things. 49 I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

Where did this day of Pentecost take place? In Jerusalem, which Jesus said would be the starting place in their commission to obey his command to be his witnesses and to testify. Why did he tell them to begin in Jerusalem, because that is where they were physically located? The sending of the gift of the Holy Spirit and the work of the Holy Spirit would begin in Jerusalem. They would start in their own neighborhood, so to speak, their own culture; which was Jewish and their own language, which was Aramaic. But then they would be sent to Samaria (say what!) and then to the ends of the earth. The witnessing and testifying would go out in concentric circles of challenge. And Jesus is telling them that they would start to include him (Jesus) in what they were talking about.

Their first challenge would be the Samaritans. They were not gentiles, but they intermingled freely with gentiles, they worshiped on the wrong mountain, they had a wrong priesthood that perpetrated the wrong worship. Jesus frankly told the Samaritan woman at the well that the Samaritans did not know who they were worshiping. They had the same language as the Jews (Aramaic) and a similar culture. They came from the same ancestors, but the Jews of Judea considered them dogs, so prejudice and hatred separated them. But Jesus said that after the gospel was preached in Judea the next place on the road "to the ends of the earth" would be Samaria.

After Samaria, these witnesses of the gospel would go to the ends of the earth. Back then some of the people believed that if you went to the ends of the earth you would fall off the edge. Not everyone believed that but one thing these men did understand was that outside Judea there were many Gentile cultures. In the Gentile cultures not everyone spoke Aramaic, the

dress styles were different, the people were of different colors. The Gentiles were Ethiopians, Romans, and Greeks, etc. But Jesus had chosen these Galileans to be his first witnesses, perhaps because as Galileans they were more open to such interactions.

In **Acts 2** the Apostles and the other disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit. It states clearly in **verse 5** that there were staying in Jerusalem God fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. Let's listen in to the story of **Acts 2 ... The Holy Spirit Comes at Pentecost:**

2 *When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ² Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³ They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues (languages) as the Spirit enabled them.*

5 *Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. ⁶ When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. ⁷ Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? ⁸ Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? ⁹ Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome ¹¹ (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" ¹² Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?"*

13 *Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have had too much wine. "*

You just have to read the list to understand where these Jews were born and what was their native tongue. These God fearing Jews are listed in **Acts 2** as Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (these were both Jewish visitors and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs. Christianity often refers to these folks as Hellenistic Jews --- Jews outside of Judea in the Greek World who

lived in areas related to Greek history, culture, or art after the time of Alexander the Great.

As you can see and understand from this list that the God fearing Jews who were gathered there were from every nation under heaven. Important question: Was the Holy Spirit given them just for their own conversion and salvation? For certain the Holy Spirit had "the ends of the earth" in mind as 3,000 people were baptized that day. But as the story takes off from here you find the Apostles themselves hunkering down in Jerusalem and not going out to Samaria or to the ends of the earth until they are forced to go. And how they were forced to go is an exciting story.

But let's continue at this point which for the Apostles is pretty much confined to Jerusalem and yet the Holy Spirit is beginning to teach the Apostles the all inclusiveness of God's gift of the Holy Spirit and God's gift of grace given through the Holy Spirit. Let's turn to **Acts 3:1-3** and read the scriptures where *Peter Heals the Crippled Beggar*:

3 One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon. ² Now a man crippled from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. ³ When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money

Let's remember that the Temple was still standing in those days, and there was a strict order of worship that was enforced. Males were the most important persons who came to worship, then females (who barely held a place as second class citizens). Last in order were Gentiles, who had to be circumcised converts to Judaism before they could enter the Temple area to worship.

Even though the New Covenant was established and ratified by the blood and sacrifice of Jesus, worship at the Temple was still under the rules and ordinances of the Old Covenant. The rules of Torah applied. According to the rules of Torah, a cripple, like this man who was carried and put down at the gate called Beautiful, had to be left outside the Temple, outside the gate. He could be laid at the entrance of the gate only. The Beautiful gate was one of the many gates that guarded the Temple proper. This poor beggar was outside the Temple because he was crippled; he was not allowed

to "enter the temple courts of the Lord with praise." Can you imagine never being allowed to praise the Lord in fellowship with other Christians? All that this man could do was watch others as they happily entered the courts of the Lord to praise and worship God. Perhaps praise and worship with others was a long ago memory kept alive by a hopeless yearning in his heart. But the "rules" of the Torah said he could not enter the Temple area for praise and worship with the others. So he's wistfully laying there looking at Peter and John, not expecting that his whole life is about to change.

Acts 3:4-10:

⁴ Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, "Look at us!" ⁵ So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.

⁶ Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." ⁷ Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. ⁸ He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. ⁹ When all the people saw him walking and praising God, ¹⁰ they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

Now this cripple has leaped to his feet and goes with Peter and John into the temple courts (verse 8) walking and jumping and praising God. And the people in the temple courts were filled with wonder and amazement. Here is this beggar no longer outside but now able to fully participate with the people of God in full worship. The name and power of Jesus has now fully included him, now he can fully participate; now he is spiritually and physically transformed.

That's the power of the Holy Spirit who works in the name of Jesus and is sent from the Father to do the Father's will in proclaiming the life of Jesus past, present and future. Therefore, by the power of the Holy Spirit in the name of Jesus Christ, people who have been marginalized, rejected, shunned, disrespected and distained are now restored to full fellowship and participation in worship and the reconciling work of the Father and the Son by the Holy Spirit.

Peter uses this opportunity to witness and testify to the people gathered at the temple (**Acts 3:11-26**). A great miracle had just occurred and Peter wanted all who were gathered around him and John and the healed man to understand without a doubt who brought about this miracle. Let's read **verses 11-26** where *Peter Speaks to the Onlooker*:

¹¹ While the beggar held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade. ¹² When Peter saw this, he said to them: "Men of Israel, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? ¹³ The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. ¹⁴ You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. ¹⁵ You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. ¹⁶ By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see.

¹⁷ "Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. ¹⁸ But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer. ¹⁹ Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, ²⁰ and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus. ²¹ He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets. ²² For Moses said, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. ²³ Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from among his people.'

²⁴ "Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days. ²⁵ And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, 'Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.'²⁶ When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways."

Now, what was the result? In **Acts 4** we see that Peter and John are arrested and put in jail overnight. The next day they testify to the facts of

this miracle before the rulers and elders, who were the Sanhedrin, which is like the Supreme Court for the Jews of that day. The rulers and elders had only one question for them; "By what power or what name did you do this?" They thought that all such power on earth resided with them, so they wanted to know where this power was coming from. Let's look at **Acts 4:13: *When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus***

In **verse 13** we see that after Peter and John declared the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth as the source of their power. The Sanhedrin noted their courage and took note that they were *unschooled*, ordinary men. In the Greek

διώτης (*idiōtēs*) : **layman**, someone not an expert, untrained (**Acts 4:13**)

Our words today for ignorant and idiot come from the Greek word translated here as 'unschooled.' Does God consider your level of education before he gives you the power to witness for Jesus Christ? No way, even children can understand the life of Jesus and accept him as savior. We all must learn about Jesus from the scriptures but it is the work of the Spirit in our hearts and minds that gives us the power and desire to be witnesses of the life of Jesus in us.

At this point the word from the Apostles is pretty much confined to Jerusalem but the Holy Spirit has the ends of the earth in mind and through certain circumstances will move the gospel out to Samaria and beyond.....
(To be continued)