

Fast Forward

BRUSSELS

2010

‘ACCORDING TO THE PATTERN’

Fast Forward Schedule

Sunday, 1 August 2010

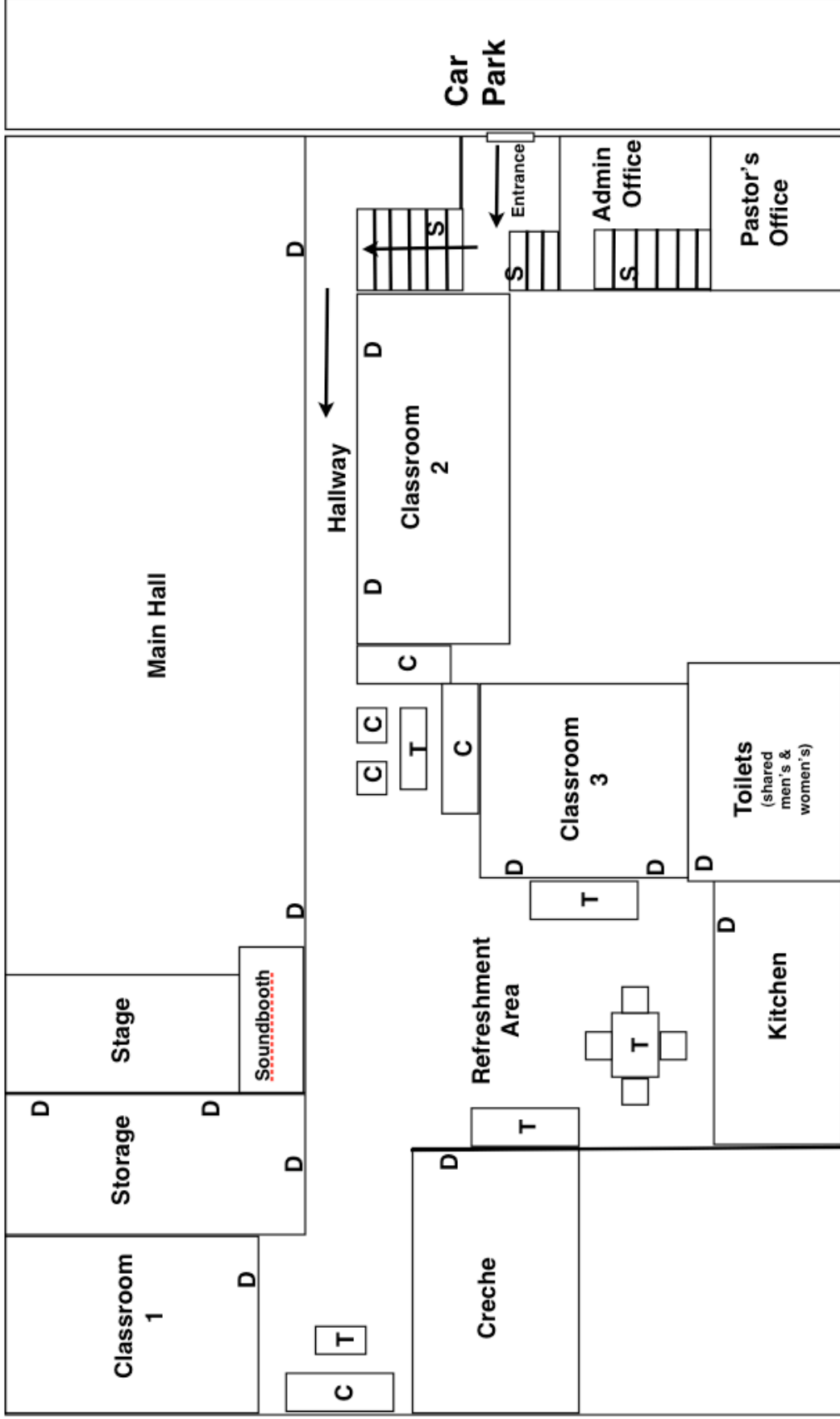
10.00 – 11.30	Celebration Gathering at Cornerstone
12.00 – 18.00	Arrival into Brussels; check in to hotel
18.00 – 19.30	Check in at Cornerstone's building
19.30 – 21.00	Gathered worship and introduction to Fast Forward

Monday, 2 August 2010

8.00 – 9.00	Breakfast (at hotel or home)
9.15 – 9.30	Devotional
9.30 – 10.15	Session 1
10.15 – 10.30	Break
10.30 – 11.15	Session 2
11.15 – 11.45	Break
11.45 – 12.30	Session 3
12.30 – 14.00	Lunch and Free Time
14.00 – 15.15	Workshop
15.15 – 15.30	Break
15.30 – 16.15	Session 4
16.15 – 16.30	Summary of the day
Free Evening	

Tuesday, 3 August 2010

8.00 – 9.00	Breakfast (at hotel or home)
9.15 – 9.30	Devotional
9.30 – 10.15	Session 5
10.15 – 10.30	Break
10.30 – 11.15	Session 6
11.15 – 11.45	Break
11.45 – 12.30	Session 7
12.30 – 14.00	Lunch and Free Time
14.00 – 15.15	Q & A Panel
15.15 – 15.30	Break
15.30 – 16.15	Session 8
16.15 – 16.30	Summary of the day
17.00 – 19.30	Dinner and Free Time
19.30 – 21.00	Gathered worship and conclusion to Fast Forward



Key: D = Door

S = Stairs

T = Table

C = Couch/Chair

Monday, 2 August 2010
'Apostolic People' – Sessions 1 & 2
Alan Scotland

1) Envisioned: A People Gathered For Purpose

The scene prior to 'the Ascension' is one of a commander in chief getting together his seemingly beleaguered troops, for re-envisioning them as to the real purpose of their mission. (Acts 1: 2)

Preceding the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, it was necessary for a regrouping in order to focus minds on the task that was ahead. The interim period was so vital, prior to the next phase of their mission. Jesus made certain that He had sufficient time with them over a period of 40 days. (Acts 1:3)

Jesus engaged them in a mission building exercise. He gave them clear direction as to the basis on which they were to proceed upon. (Acts 1:4-5). Essentially the coming of the Spirit was not to cancel out the engagement of strategic thinking, on the contrary it would result in an informed faith; a goal orientated passion for the purpose. (Acts 1:8).

It is a commonly understood principle in any company of people that three things are vital for success... Personality, Purpose and Power.

Jesus was to be the central figure and focus for the church; (Acts 4:10-11) He remains the star attraction today. The church was full of personality; the whole aspect of the 'Messiah' came into the foreground in the proceedings of the earliest Apostles. Christ being the personality of the Church God the Holy Spirit keeping it ideally – 'Christ centred'.

Unfortunately the church is proven to lose touch with its basic identity in this respect. The end result is in a community being focused on the personality, gifting of its leader, or strongly promoting its programmes.

The banner under which Jesus rallied His apostolic community was 'Christ'. All believers in this respect are 'Messianic' a title that must not be hi-Jacked to satisfy an elitism in Christianity, for it is the identity given to the whole church be it Jew or Gentile.

The purpose remains central to the success of God's people.

Jesus, in all His activity both pre and post resurrection transmitted a sense of purpose, and strategy for the energy and focus of the church, more about this later.

The power element is crucial, in that it is insufficient to be focussed around a personality full of strategy and purpose, without effectiveness, the ability to provide the goods; in this case, transformed lives, a renewed ideal and moral that certainly works. (Acts 1:8).

Prayer that changes people and situations. (Acts4:31).Power to heal, deliver and envision this is the core reality of the gospel. So much so, that Paul the Apostle was able to say with full conviction.

'I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the Power of God unto salvation.' (Romans 1:16)

The church is of all communities, the embodiment of hope, the harbinger of good news. The facilitator of power, as it works in union with the work of the Holy Spirit.

This hope was embodied in the covenants with God's people; A hope that would transform people's lives and give them a sense of destiny and the dignity to face the challenges of life and death.

God is faithful to His covenant and He is committed to the long-haul. (Acts 2:36,39).

Jesus inspired 'Hope in His followers. Their gathering together fuelled them in Hope in the Spirit's power of resurrection and Jesus being uplifted to the highest place... seated in the heavenly places, securing an advantage over His enemies.

2) Empowered: The Gift of the Spirit, the Dynamic Impact of the Kingdom

Crucial to the gathering of the disciples was the empowerment of the Holy Spirit and the accompanying high profile for the wider community. This was to prove to be the dynamic of the kingdom which could be measured by the impact that the work of the Holy Spirit was having on the witnessing public.

The corporate baptism of the Holy Spirit was not to the exclusion of the individual (Acts 2:3). It was obviously broad sweeping (Acts 2:2) whilst at the same time deeply personal and intimate.

The Holy Spirit broke the earliest disciples out of self intimidation and any reluctance to take the lead. He thrust them into the public eye and so avoided the baptism of the Holy Spirit becoming a private affair. They were indeed a people gathered, experiencing the tangible presence of God at work with them.

“When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. Utterly amazed, they asked: ‘Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites: residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs - we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!’” (Acts 2:6-11)

The Kingdom of God expanded rapidly as the Holy Spirit continued to *provoke* the apostles and prophets with a zeal that thrust them into the world and beyond their own *strategic* limitations. They were prevented from settling down, constantly pioneering new frontiers for the Gospel of Christ.

3) Expansion: The Apostolic Spirit at Work

The Apostolic Spirit spearheaded the thrust of mission constantly equipping the saints for the task that they were called to do. He is the true dynamic of the Kingdom. Christians must avoid worshipping the Spirit for his power whilst at the same time failing to co-operate with his promptings and guidance. This being His principle task for the believer – as Jesus said...

“All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” (John 14:25-26)

Much is written on the ministry of the Holy Spirit with little reference to the **strategy of the Spirit**. The book of Acts contains the strategy of the Spirit for expanding the Kingdom of God on earth.

Strategy – the science and art of employing all the resources to carry out agreed policies; the science and art of military command exercised to meet the enemy in combat under advantageous conditions; a clever plan or method; the art of employing plans towards achieving a goal. (Taken from English Dictionary & Roget's Thesaurus, W H Smith, 1986)

The New Testament as a whole and the book of Acts in particular, illustrates for us that God has his overall plan. As Commander-in-Chief, he still directs advance and the movement of his forces to fulfil the objectives. The plan of advance is summed up in Acts 1:8:

“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.”

Acts, in its entirety, is about the dynamic of the Kingdom of God. The Holy Spirit himself is about advancing the gospel of the Kingdom in the human heart and the wider community. For example, people turning to Christ in large numbers, as recorded in the book of Acts, gather quite a momentum and cannot remain hidden from view. This was not a shot in the dark. It is a clear(?) account of a well thought out happening calculated to have a substantial impact.

According to Lantee, "It was God not man, who controlled the spread of the Good News and it is God or his Spirit who issues the commands." (C. S. C. Williams, *Acts of Apostles*, Black New Testament Commentary 1964, p.17) To this end we must continue to call upon the Lord and look to God for his direction, remaining open to receive from his empowering presence in all that we seek to do for him in our world today.

Paul puts it well in Galatians when he refers to the timing of God in the sending of his son to the earth. His actions show forethought and reveal to us that he is a very thorough strategist.

"But **when the time had fully come** (specific timing), God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, **to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons** (specific purpose)." (Galatians 4:4-5)

Jesus specifically gave testimony to the Father's activity in timing events.

"He said to them: 'It is not for you to know **the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.**'" (Acts 1:7)

What is clear is that God has an agenda, and he wants his people engaged in it. What God is about has a clear objective in mind; it is the bigger picture of the advance of the kingdom. The rule of God in the heart of men & women.

4) Example: A Divine Imperative for the Church: A Sign to the World

The coming of the Holy Spirit upon the early believers at Pentecost was a significant paradigm shift in God's purposes in the earth.

The purpose was soon becoming evident; God's people gathered together in unity of heart were to experience a move of the Spirit so profound.

What was taking place was beyond an individual subjective experience (Acts 2: 3). It was the initiating of the disciples into a divine activity already taking place. The very declaration and commotion ('noise' Acts 2:2) in the actual baptism at Pentecost, was explained as extraordinary tongues cloven with fire coming upon the whole community (Acts 2:3). It was a divine interaction that was taking place (Acts 2:4). God at work and He will not be hindered in His task. The sound of an uncontrollable wind force... God was fanning the furnace of Divine Utterance.

The Holy Spirit transformed this small group of believers; liberating them from intimidation and from the reluctance that had seized hold of them, stifling their zeal and suppressing of their dreams.

The work of the Spirit was evidently successful, in projecting them into a higher visible profile (Acts 2:4-5). The people found that they soon roused the curiosity of the public arena. The baptism of the Holy Spirit was not a private affair. It was a transformation designed to be a public declaration. A transformation that took place in the lives of people as they became submissive to the work of the Spirit in their person.

"And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and were bewildered because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language. They were amazed and astonished, saying, "Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born? Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs--we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God.'" (Acts 2:6-11)

The church never began, nor was expected to continue in isolation from the world. The strategy was always with God, and it was one of thrusting his people into the nations of the world. The believers by the work of the Spirit are able to break out of self-imposed limitations into a boldness in declaring the Lordship of Christ.

The church is given the responsibility of being a prophetic statement of Christ in the world. To truly reflect God's interests and goals, affecting change in the way in which people think about God, and introducing them to a life experience of the divine. God's intention is stated clearly throughout the scriptures:

“My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.... May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me...” (John 17:15, 21)

“All authority on heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and 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!” (Matthew 28:18-20)

The mission of the church became very explicit. God expects his people to line up with the activity of the Holy Spirit. The work of the Spirit would prove to be contagious, attractive and effective in bringing about a change of heart and mind in the lives of people. The church gathering was to witness to the reality of God and kindling of hearts and minds on fire with a fervour of God in their gatherings.

The Church called to be a sign – to facilitate clear direction for those unacquainted with the person of Jesus, the purpose of his mission and the power at work to transform people.

...Assignment...

Do we provide a clear direction to others about our message and do we speak in a language that ordinary folk understand?

When asked about God, life after death, or the plain question, ‘Is there a God?’ – are we able to communicate with ease and understanding covering the things of God?

Such a dynamic interaction with the work of the Spirit and prophetic statements had a profound effect on the believers who had gathered. A deepening conviction gripped their hearts. **To convict the world** – producing a deep searching of the heart just as Jesus had said the Holy Spirit would.

Who followers of Christ represent, ought to be evident; in all walks of life, wherever the believer is to be found, there should be this acknowledgement - ‘this person is pleasantly different’. There is a sense of faith in God, an understanding as to the meaning of life, a knowledge of what God is doing in the world around us...

Are we provoking an inquiry after God?

What sort of God do we convey to the uninitiated?

Are we confident in the active work of the Spirit in our contemporary world?

To redeem the lost – the power to transform lives

Jesus stepped into peoples situations and brought about changes/challenges(?) often the redemption of lives...

Besides principles, what provision do we have for those who are bound, lonely or lack a sense of purpose? The love of God is not content with words, it translates itself into action. Deeds of hope and kindness, having an affect on the environment about it. Jesus was focussed and busy in the purpose,

yet He always found time for the interruptions and crisis in peoples lives. So must the church be willing to be interrupted.

In which ways are we demonstrating the love and power of God?

Compassion should cause us to engage with the world and not seek to escape it.

To disciple all nations – people of all cultures trained in the ways of God.

There are no borders to the mission of the church, there are no 'no-go' areas to the message of the kingdom, our mission is not to build the church, it is to reach out with the message of hope. Christ will see to it that the church is built. Jesus said '*I will build my Church...*'

The activity of the Holy Spirit in the world is not one of confrontational approach. He is steadily working in convicting the world concerning sin.

"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." (Acts 1:8)

'Witnessing to Christ is not necessarily preaching; it bears a deeper meaning. It is about carrying the testimony of the reality of Christ in ones own life. Witness comes from the word *martus*, the English equivalent being martyr denoting one who can or does what he or she has seen or heard or knows.' (W.E. Vines)

From the very outset Jesus set the mission of the church and the sphere of activity was to be the world.

"The Spirit of all mature religion is that I am my brother's keeper and my brother is my keeper.... Nothing else than the world can be our parish. Such is the case, because, having discovered the full beauty and the ultimate significance of personal life, one longs to make it a social possession; this is, to desire precisely that kind of life for every man, woman and child who enters the world..." (John Ansbro, *Dimensions of Divine Providence*, pub. Orbis Books, USA, 1986, p67)

This then is our mission: to instruct - impart - influence the world. Remembering that when we are referring to the world, we are dealing with 'the people factor'.

5) A Discipling Community

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." (Acts 2:42-47)

Meetings and programmes are important but they present a limited picture. Time and space is needed in our agendas if we are truly to learn together and have a full expression of 'koinonia' (fellowship) as was displayed in the life of the church in Acts. Church today, needs a deeper discovery of one another, to release the potential of wealth and draw on the strength and experience that each carries.

The early apostles had been schooled in Kingdom thinking throughout their relationship with Jesus. The term discipleship was very indicative of the nature of engagement that Jesus used in establishing the foundation of the Kingdom of God in their hearts. He taught them to make their priorities clear in their lives: *Seek first the Kingdom of God...*

Jesus spent invaluable days with them and used the hustle and bustle of life as their classroom. In such a way discipleship was inbred in them and out of this context Jesus revealed the Great

Commission of Matthew 28, helping them to understand that the nature of their task was to in turn disciple men and women in matters relating to the Kingdom of God.

The whole church in the New Testament was essentially a discipling community. Surrounded as it was by a pagan world, the church seized every opportunity to influence it. The Gospel had a powerful impact and its effects spread rapidly. Tertullian, the great Christian apologist, made the following declaration:

“We Christians are but of yesterday and we have filled your cities, your islands, your fortresses, your towns, your market places, the very camp, palace, senate, forum, and have left you nothing but the temples of your gods.” (Backhouse and Taylor, *Early Church History*, pub. West/Newman and Company, London, 1892, p115.)

The church, therefore, is designed to be a mobile testimony, able to travel to where the people are at and meet them at their point of need. Its message and life changing experiences will speak to the nations of the world and will be applicable to every age.

A lamp is not hidden but is placed in a position where the benefit of its light can be maximised. So too, the church is placed in the centre of human activity in order that its effect may be felt at whatever level of human experience with which its truth comes into contact. The people who have been called out from the influence of the world are to be so positioned that they will provide an understanding of a better way of life to those who are still caught up in the world and its thinking. Every Christian should contribute, however small the way, to the assisting of understanding of God in the world.

Essentially the church is a model community; an ideal that exists in a hostile world. We must not lose touch with God’s original intention, like the Israel of God; it was always intended that we should be of value to the wider community in which God places us. In God’s economy there is such a premium put on the value of the community called church. The church is meant to be a vital expression of the life of God; an attractive drawing power to the outsider. This must not be open to abuse:

“There was no merging of all private possessions in a common stock, but a voluntary and variable contribution on a large scale. That is to say, the ekklesia was a society in which neither the community was lost in the individuals, nor the individuals in the community. The community was set high above all, while the service and help to be rendered to the community remained a matter of individual conscience and free bounty.” (Fenton John Anthony Hort, D.D., *The Christian Ecclesia*, MacMillan and Co., London, 1908, p48)

Discipleship is something deeper than educating the mind. It is about broadening the mental arena and engaging the heart in a pursuit of God’s best for people’s lives. In the great awakening that took place at Pentecost, the work of the Spirit was best understood in a continued urge to disciple one another in the faith. It took the form of sharing together in communal times of prayer, fellowship and breaking of bread in one another’s homes, and focussing on what Christ had accomplished in his death, resurrection and ascension. It was about an establishing of lifestyle that encouraged a community to be known for its caring and sharing of life together. It was about the formation of friendships that transcended regional or social boundaries. Today we need to examine what we are producing.

6) The Empowerment Of The Holy Spirit

Clearly after the Pentecostal outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the church enters into a new experience that radically increases its effectiveness in the wider community.

“Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and **the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word** by the signs that accompanied it.” (Mark 16:20)

It is a mistake to assume that possessing the principles of the Kingdom is adequate in itself. The Kingdom of God has to be established in the power of God inclusive of his authoritative word, which is able to impart life to the hearers. In order to assist us grasp something of the work of the person of the Holy Spirit in this empowerment of believers, it is helpful for us to consider the book of Acts...

The, style, structure and significance of the book of Acts reveal aspects of the mind of a strategist. *We shall look at these three strands in turn.*

a) The Style of the Book

The emphasis throughout is one of 'divine interventions', which take place in remarkable ways. They are like hinges on which doorways of opportunity swing open to the message of the church. Supernatural occurrences are part and parcel of the experience of truly apostolic people – Who are cooperative with and open to the work of the Spirit as He directs their mission in life. There are clear hall marks that are the result of the empowerment of the Holy Spirit; **Divine Encounters**.

“The gift of the Spirit is God’s supreme gift to man, for it is the gift of himself.” (G. F. Nuttal, *The Holy Spirit and Ourselves*, p1)

Jesus promised that after His departure His followers would experience the Spirit’s empowerment. Yet already Jesus was alive from the dead, they witnessed Him pass through closed doors; provide miraculously in the provision of fish in their nets. Stephen as he proclaimed the gospel was transfixed by a vision of Heaven although his body was being pelted with stones (Acts 7:55-56). Saul of Tarsus had a sudden and dramatic encounter with the risen Christ, which deeply affected him preparing him for a new commissioning as an apostle of Christ (Acts 9:3).

Also **Special Enduements** in which people are deeply affected by the Holy Spirit such as being **Filled with Awe** “...we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” **Amazed and perplexed**, they asked one another, ‘What does this mean?’” (Acts 2:11-12)

Or experiencing an urgency and expedience of the Spirit as Peter was *Quickened to convey the truth in a contentious situation*. - “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 cripple and are asked how he was healed...’” (Acts 4:8-9)

Such *Provisions of boldness by the Spirit* became a matter of every day experience; “After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and **spoke the word of God boldly**.” (Acts 4:31)

In fact the number of times that ‘boldness’ or ‘with great boldness’ occurs is incredible. It shows ways in which the Holy Spirit effects people equipping them to achieve greater things than would be possible if left to in their own strength. Clearly their testimony was sharpened and their **understanding enriched as they communicated the message with power**. Jesus had forewarned them not to be anxious about what they should say, because the right words would be given them by the Holy Spirit. They certainly lacked for no good thing. Boldness was a part of their enabling for the task.

Such enduement of the Holy Spirit reflects the evidence of the Holy Spirit at work in the believer. The work of the Spirit is not limited. His commitment is to assist us and enable us to achieve individual and corporate success. We have need of an awareness of the value of operating with a quickening and enduement of the Holy Spirit.

Powerful Enablements were so evident, the Holy Spirit enabled the church to complete the task assigned. The apostles, were given the capacity to move in the realm of healings and miracles.

“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.’ Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk.” (Acts 3:6-8)

“Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. **It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit**, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord.” (Acts 9:31)

Paul is so stirred and troubled by a woman who was possessed and following them around for three days (Acts 16:17-18). Suddenly as the Spirit enables him, he is emboldened and powerfully commands her to be set free. It was so evident that the Lord was present with them, confirming with signs and wonders the validity of the message of the Kingdom that they preached.

Particular Envisionment was also a key administration of the work of the Spirit.

It is necessary at times for God to envision us since he follows a different pattern of thought. How encouraging to know that God is able to unlock our 'mind set', renewing our minds by the power of the Holy Spirit.

“...until the day he was taken up to heaven, **after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit** to the apostles **he had chosen**.” (Acts 1:2)

People often are unnecessarily straight jacketed; Trapped in small webs of thinking. Such self-limitations and narrow-mindedness are a hindrance to progress. In these chapters we find God bridging the gap that exists and removing the mindsets and entrenchments.

“[God] communicated directly through words, through dreams, through visions – employing vehicles that those he approached believed in... On occasion he communicated in more unusual ways such as thorough a donkey (Numbers 22) through an angel, or through some miraculous event... But God’s preferred way of bridging the gaps is by means of human-beings-to-human-beings...” (Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture*, Orbis Books 1979/90 p171)

Such was the impact on Peter concerning his attitude to the Gentiles. The 'Jewish mind-set' with its racial dimensions and cultural divide prevailed. The Holy Spirit powerfully liberated Peter from it. Peter was still talking about it when he arrived at the house of Cornelius. He told them that what he was doing was against the law and all his teachings, but God had told him not to hesitate (Acts 10:20-30). Such experiences of God enlighten us and enlarge our thinking and should be part of our walk with God.

It is important to remain open to the scrutiny of the Holy Spirit in order that such strongholds of the mind do not hinder the progress and strategy of the Spirit. In this respect, we with our traditions and theology must not be allowed to raise barriers in the way of the Spirit. There are so many diverse ways God wants to lead us keeping us fertile and able to adapt without being afraid or over conservative. Such was the transformation in Peter’s life that he could boldly say:

“I now realise how true it is that God does not show favouritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.” (Acts 10:34-35)

To summarise:

- Divine encounters bringing people into powerful experience of Christ and his presence.
- Enduements, helping people to receive an impartation of the Spirit quickening their faith and stirring up their gift by the laying on of hands.
- The authority of the Spirit allowing people to move with confidence in the realm of the Spirit with the authority of God.
- Envisionment is an essential approach of apostolic ministry – a people enlightened to their destiny and purpose in life.

Research the word enduement and find your own illustration for what it means.

b) The Structure of the Book

The book of Acts is about days of empowerment. The book itself is divided into 28 chapters and seems unfinished, serving as a reminder that the work of God has not ended. As we read we take great encouragement from the fact that whatever are the obstacles or the difficulties, whatever the persecution, we shall overcome because of the presence of God with us. A new day was dawning,

and God was arousing the people from their apathy. They were beginning to enquire for themselves what God was doing.

Within the space of 28 chapters, 75 questions are asked and 21 Old Testament prophecies are referred to. The number of questions reflects the profound effect the Spirit and the Word was having on people's minds. They were shaken and disturbed by what was taking place.

Today is no exception, without the aid of the Holy Spirit we are prone to settle down for less than God intends. Religion without the work of the Spirit blankets the mind and stupefies our creative faculties such as our imagination. One of the first signs of an awakening of the Spirit of God is that we start to think, examine and consider what is going on. Often, when God is doing something new, people become perplexed at the major paradigm shifts that are taking place.

What was even more significant was the prophetic framework that the apostles were moving in. They took great pains to research the Word of God and apply it to the dynamic things that were taking place in the power of the Spirit.

The Jewish mind would be more alert in those days to the importance of the Old Testament prophecies. This would reflect the teaching in the Word that Peter would have received in his discipling by Jesus. Paul would have been well trained regarding the wealth of prophecies from the Old Testament that he refers to. He was viewed as having a scholarly mind – he was a 'Hebrew of the Hebrews'.

One of the best illustrations that I received in my earliest years, was that of living a life with a capital L. The happenings of God are so profound as recorded in the book of Acts, it is a Divine inflow of the Spirit cascading across the landscape of time, flooding into regions beyond with an irresistible force and an inspiring message of hope that could not be contained in one culture, nation or part of the world. What we witness in the book of Acts is not just the inflow of the Spirit but its apostolic outflow.

c) The Significance of the Book

The significance of the book is that it is a first hand account of and the earliest record of the spread of Christianity.

It is historic, embracing as it does the development of the work of God from a small group of disciples with Jesus to an eventual world-wide movement affecting key centres such as Caesarea, Antioch, Ephesus, Phillipi and Corinth.

The curtains are drawn back on the stage of the gathered believers revealing a dramatic turning point which sets the pace for generations. The scene is so vivid as the power of God is at work, highlighting the ascension of Christ (Exaltation) and the down-pouring of the Holy Spirit (Empowering). The Holy Spirit at work in the marketplace, home, prison and upper room gatherings, God working with his people to establish His Kingdom.

7) A Strategy That Works

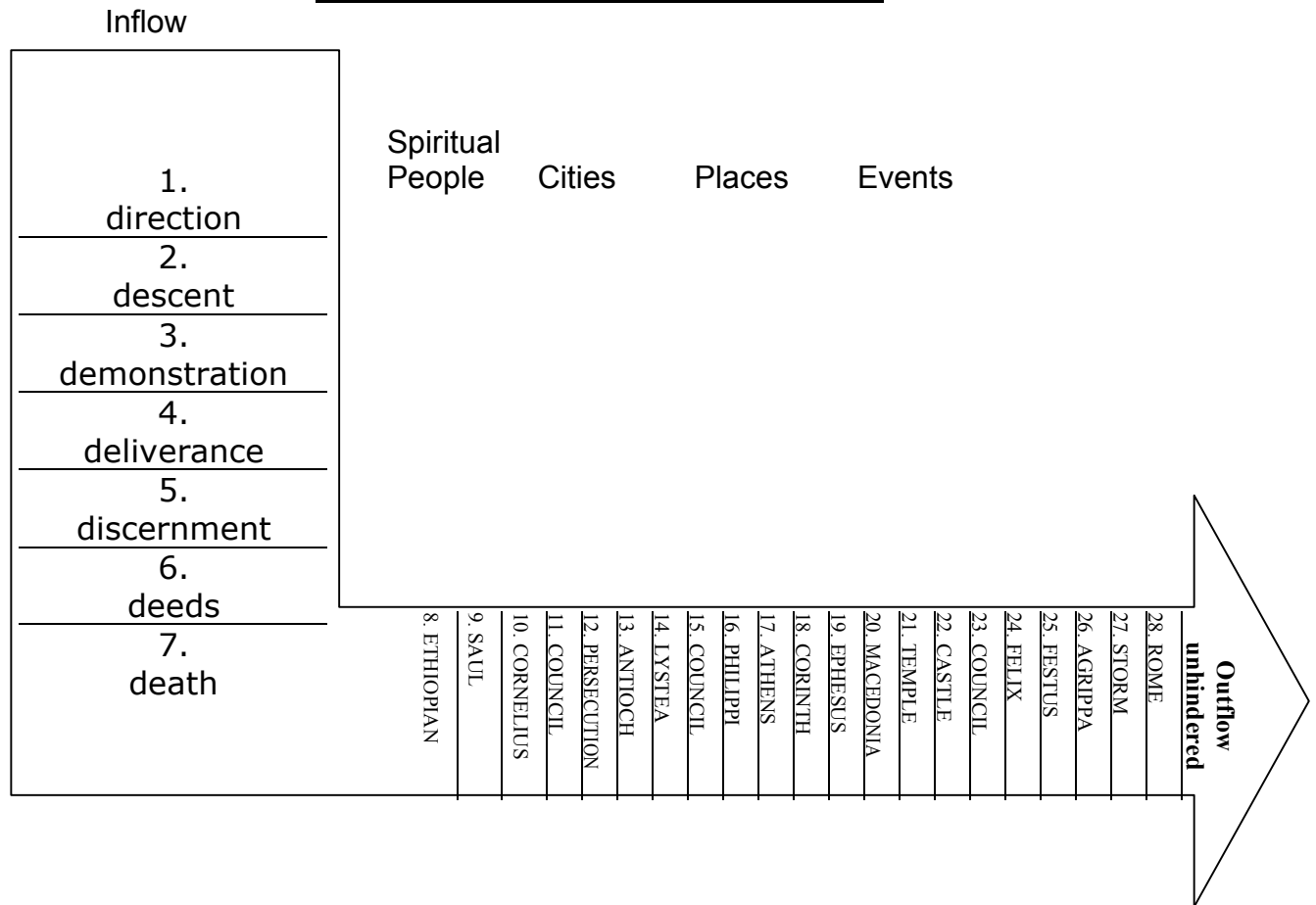
The advance of the work of God is unstoppable. In spite of the numerous hindrances from with-in or with-out the church.

God has a strategy and it works. Sometimes the church struggles to understand what God is doing, yet, if we will only read the blue print (Acts 1:8) (Matthew 28), the mandate has not changed; it is 'into all the world'.

It is fitting to look at the structure of Acts. As we trace the outline of the book a discernable strategy emerges. An essential part of the equipping of the church is a workable strategy, if it is to remain effective in reaching the peoples of the nations.

Consider the outline as we witness the directional flow of the Spirit, there is nothing haphazard about what is taking place, even if the appearance may seem otherwise...

An Outline of the Book of Acts



“The book of Acts is about a powerful release of the life of God, life with a capital L.”
(Anonymous)

Observe the elements of effective strategy given in:

A Clear Set of Directions Given: Acts Chapter 1

Jesus directs the mission and keeps things in clear focus. The disciples are able to identify with His orders given by the Spirit and absorb by the enablement of the Holy Spirit. Jesus comes across with a passion for the key issues, things concerning the kingdom.

This is what occupies his parting instructions. The focus is consistent with scriptures. The real nature of God's redemptive acts toward people is a revelation of his kingship. The followers of Christ are called to recognising their proper place as citizens in the Kingdom. It was an integral part of God's deliverance, as the song of Moses illustrated.

“The LORD will reign for ever and ever.” (Exodus 15:18)

This reality was impregnated in the mind of the psalmist when he applauded the reign of God over the entire world. His passion and vision was for nothing less.

“The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all.” (Pslm 103:19)

Such a prophetic revelation of world government was entrusted to Daniel. He made it plain that God had chosen his king to reign over the affairs of men; he was to be no ordinary person to connect with the Divine.

“In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever.” (Daniel 2:44)

“In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence.” (Daniel 7:13)

Jesus is truly the anointed king, talked about in the prophetic writings, hence the apostles, did not hesitate to declare His lordship...“...*that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth*” (Philippians 2:10)

This message of the Kingdom so profound yet so accessible to ‘whosoever’ was to be taken throughout the world with a transforming effect upon people; a people able to participate with God

The Descent of the Spirit: Acts Chapter 2

Deals with inadequacies in people; Giving them the equipping necessary to achieve the task; Enabling them to be a truly prophetic people.

Throughout the chapter, at least twelve references are made to a new eloquence something that was not taught but caught...

The baptism of Pentecost was prophetic in the sense that it gave witness to the ascension of Christ. Jesus bestows his royal blessing of power and authority. His people could now have confidence and eloquence in their communication about the Lordship of Christ. Peter cites this in his first oration in explaining what was taking place, a baptism of power by the Holy Spirit.

“Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear... Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” (Acts 2:33-36; this was the fulfilment of Christ’s predictions found in John 16:7 and 13:5)

The baptism was prophetic in the sense that it was a whole new epoch of Divine activity within the human heart. Men and women, young and old were finding their belonging to partnering in the purposes of God in their generation. The called along-side one (Paraclete) the Holy Spirit becomes the indwelling one. Empowered, equipped in order to connect with others with an understanding of the gospel. “*Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.*” (Acts 2:18)

A strategy for success needed to affect their thinking and imagination. The baptism was prophetic not only in the release of the tongue but in the opening of the mind and perceptive skills of people affected by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is the same today it will help men and women into participation with the Spirit to spread the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. “...*your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.*” (Acts 2:17)

The baptism is prophetic in that it carries a sense of continuity with the past. It can be verified in the scriptures as relevant and wholesome. It was an opportune moment to work in line with what God’s word predicted. “*These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning! No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel*” (Acts 2:15-16)

The baptism of the Spirit immerses people into a whole new redemptive experience. A new wineskin needs to emerge, enabling people to taste of the future powers of an age to come. The baptism is prophetic in the sense that joy will accompany it both in an individual and a corporate setting. A people not only envisioned, but enjoying God and serving Him. “*You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence.*” (Acts 2:28) .In the words of the chorus ...‘there is joy in serving Jesus...’

The baptism was prophetic in that it had a deeply transforming effect on attitudes and behavioural patterns, A prophetic **people are literally committed to doing God’s will, and with great joy they

devote their lives to make a difference. Consider this sense of pulling together, it reveals the affect that the move of God's Spirit is having on the Christian community. Luke refers to it when he records that:

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." (Acts 2:42-47)

So we have seen the value of a strategy that works consisting of firstly clear objectives secondly empowerment for the task and thirdly a practical outworking is seen in...

The Demonstration of the Holy Spirit: Acts Chapter 3

It records a clear demonstration of power... profoundness in their preaching enabling them to generate faith and physical healing of the lame man.

The practical healing is focused on God's and not on mans ability. This is a far call from what is often the case today. Too easily power can cause us to be caught up with people, people that become the centre of attraction, unlike the apostles who insisted on giving the credit to the ascended Christ. We can learn a lesson in humility from this, which will serve far more effectively in revealing Christ to a lost world.

"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." (Acts 3:16)

God's power is restorative in nature it is a signal of God's Kingdom and His ultimate intention to restore. *"He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets."* (Acts 3:21)

Powerful deeds of Healing miracles are part and parcel of Gods kingdom at work to this day. This particular miracle expounds the power of the Kingdom and the ability of God to bring transforming and radical change to the condition of people. *"Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days."* (Acts 3:24)

The chief demonstration of healing is a statement. The mandate is clear that the Kingdom of God will carry with it a message of blessing and hope to a hurting and a needy world. Gods people who work in faith with Him and are a blessing to the world around them.

"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.' When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways." (Acts 3:25-26)

This long awaited arrival of the Kingdom was taking place as foretold by the prophets of old. The Kingdom of God is not a religion that is anaemic or devoid of transforming qualities on the contrary it is characterised by the dynamic working of the Spirit. The kingdom comes near to the human predicament with a radical message. It precipitates a response from the heart.

"Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from among his people." (Acts 3:23)

These dynamic ingredients are so attractive to people *"the Kingdom of God is ...righteousness, joy and peace in the Holy Spirit."* (Romans 14:17)

Righteousness – the antidote to corruption
Joy – The liberation of being
Peace – the calm in spite of the outward stress of life.

God's strategy was always 'incarnation'... a life style that speaks volumes about his people... These 3 distinct qualities of, Righteousness, joy and peace.

Righteousness: God's Kingdom insists on a new basis of operation. It calls for a radical adjustment in our frame of mind; a new reliance on Christ and his righteousness which is imparted to those who believe in him.

Contagious Joy: This is a chief characteristic of the work of the Spirit. It was so evident at the baptism of the Spirit at Pentecost and in subsequent visitations and outpourings. God at work generated a sense of celebration. This in itself became an attractive magnet. The apostles who had been jailed carried this note of joy and it overflowed into every prison cell and resulted in the eventual conversion of the hardened jailer.

Peace is also a great asset. The circumstantial pressures did not cause it to fail and the pagan could not quench it. The peace of God is foundational. Such was evident in Stephen even during his martyrdom (Acts 7:55-56). It became the evident blessing on the churches throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria. God's people were protected from evil intrusion and political harassment, the peace of God contributed to the establishment of the church (Acts 9:31).

The Deliverance from Prison: Acts Chapter 4

The troubling of the believers has been predicted since the time of Christ's work on earth.

"If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you." (John 15:18-19)

Popularity will never be the measuring rod of our success, nor persecution the proof that the devil is stronger than Christ.

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)

The key is that Jesus has called us into his Kingdom for such a time as this. "*In troublesome times shall Jerusalem be built.*" (Daniel 9:25)

The key lay in the reality that Christ and His people are overcomers in times of suffering, persecution and hardship. They will possess the power to endure their prayer shall be '*deliver us from evil...*'

The great testimony is that we are "*more than overcomers.*" By the tenacity of the Holy Spirit, he will strengthen and at times intervene and rescue his people. Observe the boldness and sharp thinking of Peter when the Holy Spirit empowers him; "*Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: 'Rulers and elders of the people!'*" (Acts 4:8)

Supplied with wisdom, he was able to answer to the senior official with clarity of proclamation. He arrested the attention of the hearers, appealing to the covenant(?) agreements as we have seen recorded in the scriptures. He displayed courage as he, stood before the people and dealt with their objections.

"When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realised that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13)

Prayer also proves to be an integral part of the strategy of God for his people. A vital key to deliverance, strengthening and the intervention of God. "*This poor man cried out and the Lord heard him and delivered him out of all his troubles.*" (Psalm 34:6)

The effect of persecution becomes obvious in verses 32-36. Adversity not only causes the believer to draw on faith towards God, it brings about character formation shaping the very soul of the community. People who suffer together become bonded in a deeper commitment to each other. Resolve once it is strengthened causes people to become even more focussed on the task, and their prayer life is transformed.

“When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. ‘Sovereign Lord,’ they said, ‘you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them.’” (Acts 4:24)

Such belief is not theoretical; they fully understood that the Lord is sovereign and that he remained the key to their deliverance. Oppressions by the authorities served only to advance the message, revive the church and strengthen resolve to witness to Christ. *“Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness.”* (Acts 4:29)

Discernment at Work: Acts Chapter 5

This chapter, in a shocking way, shows the need for discernment to be exercised in church life. There was a genuine spirit of generosity on the people and it was not permitted to be abused. The Kingdom of God can only progress where there is integrity of Christ’s Spirit. It is an offence to God’s Spirit to deceive others.

“Then Peter said, ‘Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land?’” (Acts 5:3)

“Peter said to her, ‘How could you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also.’” (Acts 5:9)

“You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit!” (Acts 7:51)

Discernment is a vital gift, evidently needed to keep the church pure in motive; to protect the credibility of the community of God; and to safeguard the things of the Spirit from falling into abuse. Seldom do people in Christian circles see that the enemy within can hinder the advance of God’s Kingdom more than the enemy without. Deception has many guises, none so more threatening than when it is dressed up in its best clothes of religion.

Ananias is found to be wanting in holding onto that which should have been released, in a manipulation of the facts to make good their appearance.

Death is a feature in God’s dealing with religion. Especially a form of godliness that denies His power. King David found this to be the case in the moving of the Ark of the Covenant. Jesus himself equated some of the behaviour of the Pharisees and scribes as reflecting that of whitewashed gravestones full of dead men’s bones.

Deeds of Service: Acts Chapter 6

Administration is extremely important as the work of God expands. Everything needs proper administration or things will clog up and cause frustration. In Chapter 6 there is a beautiful picture of a body of people expressing need. The call to leadership to provide a solution that is wise. Practical suggestions and strategies emerge from the community as creative thinking and dialogue is encouraged. It is so beneficial for development. Success always has its own set of challenges. Things will often be easily overlooked, especially in a changing environment.

A healthy community will create a culture for creative administration, such elements as; A freedom to speak plainly about strengths and weaknesses; A leadership that is approachable and at the same time sensitive to genuine needs. An ethnic diversity and awareness with a greater understanding – It avoids elitism by one group over another; A Ministry that is clear as to its primary call and protects the

important; A continual recognition and development of emerging ministries; A servanthood approach of leadership.

Serving is the key to the success of any community, especially the community of Christ. Amongst Christians, there ought to be no greater ambition than to serve. What we find illustrated in this chapter ought not to be limited to the early church. If we are seeking to be useful to God then we must be prepared to start by being available to others. Our activity, zeal and desire for God must not blind us to the opportunities that are at our feet.

God's strategy calls for crisis to unlock the church...

Death of a Prominent Leader: Acts Chapter 7

The death of Stephen in Chapter 7 was a terrible incident. It would seem that everything was against the expanse of the Gospel. But God was at work. What seemed a serious set back, actually resulted in progress. We can clearly identify a shift of emphasis in which the church base for the Gospel in Judea and Samaria, being previously Jerusalem, underwent a transitional shift to Antioch.

Stephen's martyrdom was to prove a turning point and the release of a whole new phase of expansion. The seed that had fallen into the ground and died did not remain alone; it sprang up bearing much fruit.

This coupled with a renewed persecution of the church, forced Jewish Christians to scatter. Wherever they went their influence spread and many people were born again. This mass movement of testimony to the regions beyond, fulfilled the command of Christ that was over them, to go into the entire world making disciples.

It is worth looking at how in certain chapters, specific nations or key people are affected. I have illustrated them in the outline printed.

Conversion of Key People: Acts Chapters 8 to 10 (People power – our richest resource)

The greatest resource is people, especially well equipped and schooled in the reality of life. In the space of three chapters we have a cross-cultural perspective of the intention of the Spirit to reach across the world with the message of the gospel of the Kingdom. Chapter 8 – The Ethiopian who proves a key player, representing the African continent; Chapter 9 – Saul of Tarsus who is representative of the Asiatic; and chapter 10 – Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian cohort, representing the European continent.

Consider the Ethiopian – He was a very important person in his nation, his conversion would be strategic because of his influence in high places.

“Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, ‘Go south to the road, the desert road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.’ So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet.” (Acts 8:26-28)

Philip is caught up in the Spirit and directed by the Spirit's command as he educates the Ethiopian concerning Christ. Philip was unaware of the amount of preparatory work the Holy Spirit had already undertaken in regions beyond. The Holy Spirit interrupts events, and helps Philip make a more strategic move. It is imperative that we stay sensitive to the Spirit's leading and not become trapped by our successes and agenda in the work of God. The Bible is a unique source of information when it comes to how we should operate strategically. Perhaps, we have become too professional in what we feel we can do for God or how we feel we should present God instead of going through a process of enlightenment of the Spirit. There must be room for revelational information to stimulate our thinking. There must be a right relationship between skill and sensitivity

Saul was also a vital key in the expansion of the Kingdom into Gentile regions. He was the 'crème de la crème' of the religious establishment. God's choice is the best one despite the fears, anger and suspicion of the Christian community. Paul will yet prove to be a greater blessing than he ever was a threat to them. Such is the grace of God in forming a Kingdom through the persecution of the early church. God took hold of one man – Saul of Tarsus -- making him the champion of the Gospel to the Gentiles. How amazing is the grace of God in people's lives.

Cornelius, the Centurion was another turning point for the advance of the Gospel to regions beyond. Peter's encounter with him broke every religious and legal barrier. God, the Holy Spirit took the initiative in leading Peter into a whole new society. People were enquiring after God from beyond the Jewish sector. The Holy Spirit had to help leadership to breakout of their current framework of mind set.

"At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, 'Cornelius!' Cornelius stared at him in fear. 'What is it, Lord?' he asked. The angel answered, 'Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God.'" (Acts 10:1-4)

Cornelius is deeply affected by 'the reality of God'. He is earnest in his quest to make a proper connection with God. This was no flash of brilliance; it was a deep yearning of his heart and life. He was not content with the status quo. He shared a deep commitment to change and a human dedication to God and fellow men, which reflects a certain attitude of life that attracted Divine attention. Cornelius touched God's throne, both he and Peter found a Divine strategy for the way forward in their praying.

God's purposes are not detached from the deep longings of the people. Often, we carry burdens, desires, and longings for God that he has placed in our hearts. This is the prerequisite for change. The language often used to describe this is 'hunger and thirst'.

- **Prayer** was not a theoretical exercise; it was linked to a self-less lifestyle. Their prayer lists were in line with the interests of God.
- **Prayer** preceded one of the greatest advances of God's Kingdom into the Gentile world. It was the key that unlocked a greater move of God.
- **Prayer** was the prerequisite for the outpouring of the Spirit in great measure on this whole household.

The angelic presence and the vision from Heaven were all born out of prayer and appeal to God.

There is no exclusivity with God. The four corners of the sheet refer to the universality of the gospel message. International borders or cultural boundaries will not limit it.

The sheet came down from Heaven, the place that initiates all blessing in our world. It shows a unity in diversity, being the quality of expression we are to enjoy in God's Kingdom.

A sense of breakthrough was being called for; a refusal to settle for what we have, the need to break out of the restrictions into the wider arena of advance. A new season was springing upon the church. It needed to become unshackled from its own properness and released to touch the unsanctified. It was time to connect to a people who were considered outsiders and it calls for a gracious acceptance of those who were different. The good must not shackle us and stop us from pursuing the best. the advance of God's purpose in people's lives must go on – the mission is not complete.

8) The Gifts of Enablement

A constant expansion of the horizons took place as the Holy Spirit equipped, envisioned and thrust the ministry of the church outward

Key Involvement of the Spirit in the Church - FOCUS

The Holy Spirit, whilst giving focus to Christ and his will in the church, was never viewed as the silent, impersonal force at work in the church. In fact, the Holy Spirit's dynamic was discovered in the demonstration of personal qualities in the church.

"After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly." (Acts 4:31)

His presence had a powerful and effective charge in the gatherings in which he was outpoured.

"As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning." (Acts 11:15)

"When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied." (Acts 19:6)

Strategic Direction

The strategic direction that they received as a community came from the person of the Spirit. The Spirit and not a flash of brilliance determined their agenda.

"While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, **the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.'**" (Acts 13:2)

Great premium was put on inquiring after God in periods set apart for this purpose.

Fasting was not a heavy session of waiting. It was peppered with a beautiful spirit of worship and celebration.

The space given for the Lord was considered vital and proceeded plans for expansion.

New commissioning and exploits were birthed in the presence of God.

New partnerships were forged in times set apart to hear from the throne of God.

Calling was not a man made choice for a convenient decision. It originates from God and is confirmed by his Spirit.

"It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements." (Acts 15:28)

Strengthening of Resolve

The Holy Spirit brought well being to the church through his executive leadership. One of the key marks of the Spirit of God at work is this sense of rightness of things and the atmosphere of wholesome respect for God. The anticipation of the Spirit's involvement and direction of affairs.

"Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. **It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit,** it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord." (Acts 9:31)

This constant interaction of the Holy Spirit as the one called alongside (?...), was a profound source of strength and encouragement to the believers. The words of Jesus must have constantly revisited*(?) the church, '*when he is come he will lead you into all truth*'.

9) The Practical Advantages of People Filled with the Spirit

A Spirit of Servant-hood Becomes Evident...

Acts 6 is a significant passage in showing us the priority God places on ministry in His community. We cannot fulfil our obligations without the anointing of the Spirit. The advantages of the Spirit filled life are very practical.

The apostles were faced with the need to embrace change as the work continued to expand. These Spirit filled men did not just seek out gift they were interested in responsible people, who were willing to serve, filled with the Holy Spirit and with wisdom.

People filled with the Spirit of Christ will take a keen interest in the lives of people. They will seek out the solutions by first of all listening to the problems that people are facing and accepting the need to make necessary changes to avoid 'lock-up'.

“In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, ‘It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.’ This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. 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.” (Acts 6:1-7)

Consider several traits noticeable in the local situation; refer to Acts 6.

1. The leaders, with sensitivity to the Spirit, show respect to the work of Christ's Spirit in the church. They give him his rightful place of authority. *‘Choose several men who are known to be full of the Holy Spirit – reference – Alan please check the words in this quote...?’*
2. Philip who was chosen, reached out to others in evangelism. It attracted people of stature into the gathering such as large numbers of priests who were converted through his commitment.
3. The morale of the people is uplifted when Spirit filled people are appointed to the task of overseeing. A genuine realisation that they are considered in the changes being made that will effect their situations. A sense of security with the church as leadership authority open to entreaty; people are not afraid to ask questions or appeal to them or express their genuine concerns.
4. Leadership will advance on every front; not afraid to serve and give attention to menial tasks.
5. The Holy Spirit enables people to prioritise on the important. Such as when the first apostles were released from the details of administration by the helping of each other to concentrate on first priorities; Word and Prayer. Every one willing to serve in some capacity, releases the whole to concentrate on the task in hand, such as the Lord has appointed for each one.

The results of the leading of the Spirit were tangible. The emphasis was kept on breaking new ground. Sufficient time is given to explain God's word to the people who would otherwise have been locked up with too many details. When the Spirit is lacking in any work, principles of the Word become threadbare and lack luster. However, when the church is moving in the Spirit, the Gospel principles become sharper and more exciting.

Disadvantages of Neglecting the Work of the Spirit

When the Spirit is hindered, advancement is obstructed and the inspirational elements of the work of the Spirit become sidelined by the business of administrative tasks.

When sensitivity to the Spirit is retarded, fruitfulness is affected which is made obvious by the evident lack of new birth in the church community.

The church community loses its sticking power, people drift and new additions fall away.

A sense of God's direction is lost. The prophetic element ceases to be effective in the meetings.

People become tired of being left with an event orientated meeting.

Resisting the Holy Spirit is referred to strongly by Stephen and is offensive to the religious establishment. He spoke out boldly when he said:

“You stiff necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit!” (Acts 7:51)

Ignoring the Spirit Must Be Avoided

Ignoring the Spirit's interaction is a serious charge to make, It is the last thing that we would want to admit to. Certainly we would knowingly or willfully resist the Holy Spirit. We are not always aware when we are doing so. The idea is so foreign to us, which was no doubt what created such a reaction against Stephen and resulted in his martyrdom.

May God deliver us from discriminating against what God is doing in people's lives. Stephen became a martyr of people's prejudice. We must avoid the habit of marginalising others even in our thinking, or reacting against uncomfortable confrontation Gods word in our lives.

Stephen was part of an emergence of the wider giftings to the church.

Good Administration Cooperates with the Spirit

Every church community must be careful not to over-administrate the work of the Spirit. Management is good, but it must make room for the Holy Spirit to redirect and refocus the church.

A clearer recognition and respect of gifted ministries is needed. It calls for a constant cooperation with the work of the Spirit. We must all seek the mind of the Spirit in each given church situation.

Apostles who learn to ride in tandem with the Spirit will keep in pioneer mode able to advance God's purpose. The dual operation of the Spirit will keep the church on track he will direct the affairs of its ministry sometimes with restraint and sometime with constraints.

Consider the dual role of the Spirit as seen in Acts 16.

RESTRAINT – the Confinement Of The Spirit

“Paul and his companions travelled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to.” (Acts 16:6-7)

It is easy to press ahead with what seems a good idea only to find that it does not have the ownership of God on it. It is important to learn the voice of the Holy Spirit in restraining us. Enabling the church to know what to give its energy to and what to withhold from: - its mission.

This sensitivity to strategy and to the Holy Spirit is precisely what is needed today. The church must be prepared for redirection if it is to avoid wrong entrenchment. The Holy Spirit will sometimes keep us from an action. At other times he will direct us with specific details. Flexibility and availability are called for, if God's people desire to be useful to the Lord.

“The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus.” (Acts 13:4)

CONSTRAINT – The Compelling Urge Of The Spirit

This requires learning to yield to the gentle pressure of the Spirit.

“After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.” (Acts 16:10)

We must never be too quick to engage ourselves when there is often a legitimate reason why the pathway is being obstructed. The apostle referred to times when he wanted to pursue a course only to be hindered by Satan, witnessing persecution and violence. However he also confessed to the leading of the Holy Spirit; Recognising the leading of the Spirit. I have never known anything else but the gentle persuasion that is characteristic of the Spirit of God. God constantly wants us to focus our attention and channel our energies more efficiently.

Sometimes the pointedness of the Spirit came across in clear prophetic utterance, such as with Agabus...

“After we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. Coming over to us, he took Paul’s belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, ‘The Holy Spirit says, “In this way the Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.”’” (Acts 21:10-11)

Indicative of the prophetic nature of the strategy of the Spirit is the directional word. Such is the incident recorded about Agabus. Clear specifics and meaning is given in what the Holy Spirit is saying to God’s servants.

The Targeting of Key Cities

Antioch was another important place for the move of the Spirit. It was the doorway into the Gentile world, the capital of Syria and it was to be a springboard for outreach of the Gospel. It was not long before a church was established there, becoming a base of operation for the apostle Paul. In fact, the first record of activity in Antioch and Syria highlights the evidence of the hand of God at work with a great response from the people towards salvation. With such a resource available to him, the apostle Paul was able to use Antioch as a major springboard for his three missionary journeys.

“In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.” (Acts 13:1-3)

Corinth was a famous Grecian city and another important place. The commercial centre for Greek enterprise, it was also the capital of Achaia, one of the two great provinces into which Greece was divided by the Romans, the other being Macedonia. *“It was the centre of business and political power. What Jerusalem was to the religious Jew, Corinth was to them commercially.”* (David Thomas, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Dickinson, 1889, London)

It was also clear that the best means of penetrating the Greek culture was to start at Corinth, as it was the meeting place of the philosophers of the day.

Ephesus opened up an avenue for the Gospel into Asia. The Holy Spirit was clear in his objective in establishing the church at Ephesus. It was the seat of government for the whole of the province of Asia and therefore very strategic.

Perhaps a more helpful illustration of the chapters can be summed up in the following outline. This will provide a context and a gauge by which we can see the strategic expanse of the work of the Spirit through the apostles.

CHAPTERS	TIME SPAN	REGIONS
Acts 1-8	AD 33-35	Jerusalem
Acts 8-13	AD 35-48	Judea and Samaria
Acts 13-28	AD 48-72	Uttermost parts

Monday, 2 August 2010
'The Church: The Dynamic Expression of Christ
in the Earth' – Session 3
Geoff Brown

THE UNCHANGED PLAN

- God who himself is community extends that rule over all the earth through those that are in his image and likeness. (Genesis 1-3)
- Forming filling and rest
- Fall, the abuse of rule relating to a fruit compromises fruitfulness for all who
- are “after their kind”
- Reconciling all things to Himself. (Colossians 1:20)

THE MESSIANIC GOD/MAN

- Isaiah 9
- Isaiah 11
- Isaiah 53
- Isaiah 61
- The new fruit with the seed in it to reproduce “after its kind”

OUR SPIRITUAL DESCENT

- The word became flesh And... (John 1:14)
- Who shall declare his generation...? (Isaiah 53:8 cf v10b)
- Many brothers (Romans 8:29)
- Matthew’s mathematics (Matthew 1:17)

THE CHURCH HIS CONTINUING BODY

- Ephesians 1:22-23: Christ the head of the body
- Ephesians 3:6: Gentiles and Jews together
- Ephesians 4:4: Indivisibly unified body
- Ephesians 4:12: Body for work cf Adam’s pre-fall work “+”
- Ephesians 5:23-30: The bride Church
- 1 Corinthians 12:12-13: Many parts
- Colossians 1:18: Supremacy in all things in the church
- Colossians 2:19: The head who makes growth in working together

GODS PURPOSE IN THE BELIEVER

- Perfect like your Father (Matthew 5:48)
- Perfect through Christ (Galatians 4:9)
- Perfected through the word (2Timothy 3:17)
- The whole package is corporate “synergesthai” – together (Ephesians 4:13)
cfHeb11:40

SAME SPIRIT (Romans 8:11)

FULLNESS IN CHRIST

John 1:16
John 3:34
Ephesians 1:23
Ephesians 3:19
Ephesians 4:13
Colossians 1:19
Colossians 2:9

MEASURE IN THE BELIEVER

John 1:16
Romans 12:3
Ephesians 4:7
Ephesians 4:13
Ephesians 4:16
Corinthians 12:11

Christ is the fullness of everything we see in the church

Fullness of

Spirit
 Grace
 Word
 Power
 Fruit of the Spirit
 MINISTRY
 Apostle in fullness
 Prophet in fullness
 Evangelist in fullness
 Pastor in fullness
 Teacher in fullness
 GIFT
 Spirit of wisdom
 Spirit of knowledge
 Spirit of faith
 Spirit of healing
 Spirit of miracles
 Spirit of prophecy
 Spirit of discernment
 Spirit of tongues
 Spirit of interpretation

Measure of

Spirit
 Grace
 Word
 Power
 Spiritual fruit
 Ministry
 Some apostles
 Some prophets
 Some evangelists
 Some pastors
 Some teachers
 Measure of gift
 Word of wisdom
 Word of knowledge
 Gift of faith
 Gift of healing
 Gift of miracles
 Gift of prophecy
 Gift of discernment
 Gift of tongues
 Gift of interpretation

GOD'S WILL IS CHRIST'S FULLNESS IN THE CHURCH (Ephesians 3:10-11)

PROGRESSION IN SONSHIP

- The saved son *teknon* – John 1:12
- The mature son *huios*
- The objective of fathers is to ultimately raise fathers.
- The CORPORATE SON (Ephesians 1:5; Galatians 4:19)
- Jigsaw Illustration – the fullness of the completed jigsaw.

Ephesians 1:22-23; 3:19: Fullness is our destiny and the end of the age awaits that fullness, (not on events in Israel)

cf Hebrews 10:12-14; Romans 16:20; 8:18-39' Acts 3:21

DESTINED TO BE LIKE HIM (1 John 3:2)

FREED TO BE LIKE HIM (Romans 8:1-4)

CALLED TO BE LIKE HIM (Romans 8:28)

ENABLED TO BE LIKE HIM (John 1:12)

Transformed to be like him

Monday, 2 August 2010
***'The Local Church: The Function and Functioning of
Ministry Gift and Government Gift' – Session 4***
Geoff Brown

THE CHALLENGE OF THE CHURCH

- The church needs leadership, manifestly Christ is its head, but the issue of where Christians place authority on the earth, has divided Christians throughout church history.
- Where do Christians draw their model of authority, culture, tradition, Judaism, the state, the Word?

LIFE IN THE GAP

- Where did local church leaders come from?
- What happened between two missionary journeys in Acts?
- Where was wider accountability?

PATTERNS, PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE

The vocabulary of leadership/government

- Jethro ?
- Hebrew "Meleck" and "Nagiyd"
- Koine Greek "Katartismos" (Ephesians 4:12)
- Classic Greek
- The Messianic model

GIFT AND GOVERNMENT

- spiritual gift, measure faith (Romans 12:6-8)
- rule , measure of character (1 Timothy 3:2-12; Titus 1:7-8)
- presbuteros , episkopos , diakonos
- see character list (a)

FULLNESS IN THE CHURCH

- Ephesians 4:11 – "some to be....." 1 Corinthians 12 – all have gift?
- Diversity in unity – creation
- 1 Corinthians 12:4-6

Diversity

different kinds of gift
different kinds of service
different kinds of working

Unity

same Spirit
same Lord
same God

PURPOSE OF GIFTINGS

- All spiritual gifts are manifestations of the Holy Spirit enabling a person to serve (minister to) the needs of the body. Even the evangelist serves the need for the body to grow. 1 Corinthians 12:7; cf 1 Peter 4:10-11
- They must all declare the Lordship of Christ (not the merit of the gifted) see 1 Corinthians 12:3
- The Body Model – Ephesians 4:16 as each part does its work

Key Passage – 1 Corinthians 12:1-31

There is no exhaustive list of spiritual gifts because there is no limit to the scope and generosity of their infinite giver. Those we can easily list include the following

- Words of wisdom
- Words of Knowledge
- Gifts of faith
- Gifts of healings
- Gifts of miracles (including acts of power)
- Prophecy

- Distinguishing/discernment of spirits
- Different types of tongue
- Interpretation of tongues

v11 In all God is sovereign

v12 The body is the expression of the fullness of Christ the head the unified expression of His infinite diversity (Ephesians 1:22-23)

v13 No racial cultural social distinction, *formed* as one body *filled* with the Holy Spirit to overflow in fruitfulness. cf days of creation

v14-20 No superiority - all must exercise their gifts for the good of all including the ruling gifts (1 Peter 1:5; Acts 6:1-6)

v21-26 No inferiority- apparently less prominent functions are absolutely indispensable, and should thereby be accorded even greater honour !!!!!!!

v27 "Now you are the body of Christ" is addressed to the local Church in Corinth

v28 Ruling ministry gifting is ranked "first apostles..." however, body ministry gifts are not ranked. (*Forming* ranked, *filling* not ranked?)

v27 Evangelists ministry is conducted outside the local body and therefore absent from this list.

Note: Apostles and prophets- foundational (Ephesians 2:20)
 Teachers –aspect of pastoral office (Ephesians 4:11; 1 Timothy 3:2)
 Admin + helps appear included as service to ruling ministry

v31 "but *you* earnestly desire the 'greater' gifts" = Rank

1 Cor 13:1 – IT'S A HEART ISSUE

IN THE WORLD YOU CAN BE GIVEN AUTHORITY BUT YOU MUST WIN THE RIGHT TO EXERCISE IT.

IN THE CHURCH A PERSON IS APPOINTED TO RULE WHEN WE RECOGNISE THAT THEY ARE, BY THEIR CONDUCT, ALREADY FUNCTIONING IN THE GRACE OF GOD'S AUTHORITY.

RULING COMES OUT OF ROLE NOT RANK, BUT THE OFFICE IS ONE OF RANK.

ANYONE WHO RECEIVES A GIFT OR GIFTS FROM GOD IS OBLIGATED TO USE THEM "for the common good" AND EVERY CHRISTIAN RECEIVES A GIFT.

What then, distinguishes the functions of rule in the body?

The primary difference is one of accountability, whereas each member of the body is accountable for each other (*we are our brothers keeper*) an elder is individually accountable to God for the entirety of the flock to the limit of his measure (spiritual capacity, grace, gift, anointing)

SOME BROAD FUNCTIONS OF ELDERSHIP

Overseer	<i>episkopos</i>	Acts 20:29	1Pet 2:25
Ruler	<i>proistemi</i>	to preside	Rom 12:8 1Tim 3:4,5,12; 5:17 1Thess 5:12
Feeder	<i>poimano</i>	shepherd	Jn 21:16 Acts20:28 Jude 12
Watchman	<i>gregoreo</i>	keep spiritually awake	Lk12:37 Acts 20:28-30 1Thess 5:6+10
Teacher		apt to teach	Titus 1:7+9
Student of word		maintaining sound doctrine	1Tim 3:2 2Tim 2:24 Titus 1:17
Intercessor		Jas. 5:15-16 Rev 5:8 Rev 8:3+4	
Example		Phil 3:17 1Thess 1:6 2Thess 3:9	
Leader		Heb 13:7,17+24 Lk 22:26	

Self-sacrificial servant Rom 12:1-2 Lk 14:25-33
Industrious one 1Tim 3:1, 1Thess 5:13, Phil 2:30, 1Cor 3:13-15
Loyal team member Phil 2:19-22
Giver 2Cor 8:2+5 2Cor 9:5+6
Keeper of unity Eph 4:1+2 1Cor 1:10
Leading worshipper Rev 4:4+11

ALL CHRISTIANS HAVE GIFTS
ALL CHRISTIANS ARE CALLED
OUR VALUE IS NOT ACCORDING TO OUR RANK IN THE BODY OR OUR ROLE IN THE BODY IT
IS IN THE CROSS OF CHRIST.

THE CREATED VARIETY OF MAN EXPRESSES THE INFINITY OF GOD, THEREFORE THE
MORE WHOLE AND EFFECTIVE OUR FUNCTIONING TOGETHER IS, THE MORE COMPLETE IS
THE TESTEMONY OF CHRIST IN THE EARTH. THIS IS THE BRIDE IN HER GLORY WHICH WILL
PROVOKE THE END OF ALL THINGS.

SO ON TO MATURITY!

Tuesday, 3 August 2010
***'Understanding the Person and the Work of the Holy Spirit in
the Life of the Church' – Sessions 5 & 6***
Ian Rawley

1) Introduction

The Holy Spirit is the person of the Triune Godhead who is most frequently represented in Scripture as manifesting God's presence in the world generally and among his covenant people in particular.

This is especially true in the era of the New Covenant. We might even go so far as to say that the Christian era is the era of the Holy Spirit, and that within that period of approximately 2000 years, the last 100 of them have arguably been ones in which the church - and even the world - have become more aware of the person and work of the Holy Spirit than at any previous time in history.

It is fitting therefore that we are taking time together to consider what the Scriptures have to say about this vital aspect of our Christian faith. Let us be open to what God might want to challenge us about during these days together, both regarding our own lives and also the responsibilities towards others that we carry as God's stewards and servants.

There is no way that what follows should be construed as a comprehensive or systematic overview of this important area of doctrine, spirituality and praxis. Rather, we will be highlighting certain aspects of the pneumatological reality and dipping in to some of them more deeply than others. You are referred to the vast literature on this subject for further and fuller references.

Finally, please be advised that although for the sake of presentational clarity, the following headings have been devised, the truth that they represent is not so neatly sectionalised and must be understood as being integrated and holistic in a way that is not immediately obvious from the segmentational approach taken below.

2) The Promise

Let us begin with a promise. In his Gospel, in what we call chapters 13 to 17, John paints an intimate picture for us of the final hours of Christ's ministry among his disciples. In the recorded discourse, Jesus several times refers to a new era of the Spirit that is about to begin. In fact, these passages contain the only formal teaching about the Holy Spirit in the New Testament.

He first mentions this in 14:16-21.

'I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth....he lives with you and will be in you...'

The promise to individually indwell echoes what Jesus had said previously said at the Feast of Tabernacles (John 7:37-39).

Jesus continues in vv 25-26.

'All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.'

And also in 15:26.

'When the Counsellor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me.'

Jesus elaborates further in 16:5-15.

'...It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counsellor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you...he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come...'

Cf. Luke 24:49a

'I am going to send you what my Father has promised...'

NB: both God the Father and God the Son send The Holy Spirit to us. You might want to reference the debate about the Filioque clause in the Western text of the Nicene Creed that divided the Western and Eastern Church in the Middle Ages and formed the main doctrinal issue at the heart of the Great Schism of 1054.

3) The Paradigm

The crucial difference between the pre and post Pentecost experience is that the Holy Spirit after Pentecost permanently indwells every Christian believer. From the beginning, the Holy Spirit had been an active agent in creation (Genesis 1:2) and in remonstrating with men who were sinning against God (Genesis 6:3). He called and empowered people to do extraordinary things (egs: Judges 3:10; 13:24-25, 14:6 etc) and to prophesy eg: Zech 7:12. The apostle Peter actually talks about the Spirit being in the OT prophets (1 Peter 1:10-11), but crucially that experience is never permanent nor is it ever for all God's people.

The promise to individually indwell on a permanent basis is the specific privilege of the Christian believer.

John 3: 5-7; 1 John 3:24; Acts 2:38

Thus, the era of the Spirit has thus introduced a new paradigm. 2 Corinthians 5:17

4) The Paraclete

The word translated Counsellor (NIV) or Helper (NASB) or Advocate (NRSV) is the Greek word *parakletos*, which means literally a person summoned to one's aid. Used in the Greek writers to refer to a legal advisor, defence counsel, mediator or pleader or one who comes forth on behalf of another. Cf. the word *diabolos*, which was used of the prosecuting counsel! (See Revelation 12:10 for John's use of this word to describe the work of Satan against the saints of God.)

The Spirit's function is to represent God to the believer (Romans 8:26-27) and the believer to God (1 John 2:1).

'Another' is the Greek word *allos*, which means another of the same kind (cf. *heteros*). He would function as Christ had on the earth – only more so because he is not geographically limited, neither will he ever withdraw. He is also invisible and internal.

5) The Person

By calling the Spirit 'of the same kind', Jesus was clearly implying that the Spirit would be a person, not simply an impersonal force.

Note the activities that are associated with personality that are attributed to the Holy Spirit in each of the following passages of Scripture.

He contends – Genesis 6:3
He speaks – Acts 21:11
He directs – Acts 13:2,4
He teaches – Luke 12:12
He guides – John 16:13

He counsels – John 14: 16-18
He intercedes – Romans 8:26
He convicts – John 16:8-11
He testifies – John 15:26
He reveals – Luke 2:26
He appoints – Acts 20:28

The Holy Spirit has intelligence (eg: 1 Corinthians 2:11b), a will (eg: Acts 16:7) and emotional responses (eg: Ephesians 4:30).

6) The Empowerer

Our birthright is to be baptised in/with/by the Holy Spirit and fire and clothed with power from on high. (Matt 3:11; John 1:32-34; Luke 24:49b; Acts 1:8; 2:17-18 (quoting Joel 2:28-32); 38-39.

Don't get too mesmerised by the nomenclature – get the experience!

The NT church modelled it for us. See numerous references in Acts, for example: 4:8, 31; 6:5,8; 13:9-11 etc. See too Romans 15:19; 1 Corinthians 2:4; 1 Thessalonians 1:5;

Gifts of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:11)

Revelation to apostles and prophets (Ephesians 3:5)

Guardian of the truth entrusted to us all (1 Timothy 1:14)

The guide who daily leads us (Romans 8:14)

Who gives all believers access to the Father (Ephesians 2:18)

Who Testifies of our adoption as children and heirs of God (Romans 8:16-17)

And is the pledge/guarantor/down payment of that inheritance (2 Corinthians 1:22)

Who calls/appoints/authenticates church leaders (Acts 20:28)

Who blesses the persecuted (1 Peter 4:14)

Who brings Divine presence to the church (1 Corinthians 3:16 cf. 14:24-5) + strength and encouragement (Acts 9:31) + unity (1 Corinthians 12:13).

We might go so far as to say that 'without the pneuma (Spirit) there is no soma (Body)'.

The work of the Spirit can be summarised as empowering believers individually and corporately to live and move and have our being in the atmosphere of God's manifest presence at all times and in all places.

7) The Proviso

The Holy Spirit gives greater or lesser evidence of the presence and blessing of God in our lives, at least in part according to our response to him.

'You always resist the Holy Spirit' (Acts 7:51)

'Do not grieve the Holy Spirit' (Ephesians 4:30)

'Do not put out the Spirit's fire [quench the Holy Spirit]' (1 Thessalonians 5:19)

'Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you...So glorify God in you body' (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

'Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit? (Acts 5:3)
'How is it that you have agreed together to tempt [put to the test] the Spirit of the Lord?' (Acts 5:9)

'who has...outraged [insulted] the Spirit of grace' (Hebrews 10:27)

'...blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven...' (Matthew 12:31-2 cf. Mark 3:29 and Luke 12:10)

8) The Partaking

'Let yourselves be continually filled with the/in the Spirit!' (Ephesians 5:18)

The immediate context of this Pauline exhortation is the injunction not to get drunk on much wine. Paul's contrast is actually a surprising one. We might have expected him to urge abstinence – or at least moderation – instead of intemperance. Instead he urges his readers to draw fully upon the re-energising Holy Spirit.

He implies a filling full of our human spirit with the Holy Spirit. The Greek verb tense is the present continuous imperative, in the passive mode. Therefore, it is a command for all believers to cooperate with the Holy Spirit and to allow him to do what he wishes to do for us all.

Cf. Luke 11:13 where Jesus says '...how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who **ask** him.' [Emphasis added].

See also the previous prophetic invitation of Jesus at the Feast of Tabernacles.

'If any man is thirsty, let him come to me and drink...By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive.' (John 7:37,39)

It is unlikely that Paul is urging his readers to enter in to a new experience. Much more probably he is encouraging them to continue as they have begun. On the Day of Pentecost, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples was mistaken by onlookers for drunkenness.

Paul is surely not insisting that the presence of the Holy Spirit should always result in such an extreme manifestation, but he is certainly commenting upon the great power of the resource available to each believer and he clearly anticipates the potential impact on us of such a continual infilling.

It is noteworthy that the immediate outcome of this Holy Spirit infilling is a life of continual thankfulness to God that is expressed in an overflow of praise. (vv 19-20).

9) The Proving

Cf: making bread, in which the yeast 'proves' the dough to facilitate its transformation into bread. With us, the 'yeast' of the Holy Spirit is working away to facilitate our transformation into the person we will ultimately become.

'But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.' (1 John 2:2b-3).

Although the word sanctification is sometimes used in the NT to mean something instantaneous and positional (egs: 1 Corinthians 6:11; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2;) it is more frequently used to describe something that is progressive and experiential, and indeed that is the emphasis found in the NT. egs: Romans 8:13; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 1 Thessalonians 4:3,7. 2 Peter 1:3.

See especially Paul's comments about the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23. NB: the word in Gk for fruit (karpos) is in the singular. The point is that we cannot pick and choose as if it were a buffet selection!

All of these characteristics of the Holy Spirit should be ongoing and increasingly manifested as we mature and 'are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.' (2 Corinthians 3:18)

10) The Imparting

The 'laying on of hands' is included in what the writer of Hebrews calls the elementary teachings about the Christ, which should be considered as part of our foundational understanding about our Christian faith. (Hebrews 6:1-2)

Prayer, prophetic utterance or both normally accompany the act and either imparts a new spiritual reality, or confirms and recognises an existing one.

It was a practice well known to the Jewish Christians to whom the letter was addressed because it was part of their Jewish roots.

Three broad purposes may be identified:

a) Incorporation

The first mentioned instance of the practice is the blessing of Joseph's two infant sons by his aged father Jacob. The story is found in Genesis 48. Jacob decides to adopt the two grandsons as his own sons. Note the greater importance of the right hand, which Jacob put deliberately over the younger son Ephraim, instead of over the older son Manasseh, as Joseph expected.

In the NT, we see Ananias laying his hands upon Saul, which marked the latter's incorporation in to the Christian community. (Acts 9:10-19). In addition to this, the laying on of hands also brought about physical healing and baptism in the Holy Spirit. (See section c below)

b) Identification

Most references to the laying on of hands in the OT are broadly related to the sacrificing of animals, and specifically to the identification of the person with the animal about to be slaughtered.

The outstanding example is the account of the scapegoat. The story is found in Leviticus 16:20-22. See too the account of burnt offerings in Leviticus 1:3-4. Although these rites are far removed from our present experience, there are still some parallels, which can inform contemporary practice.

More relevant is the story in Numbers 8 in which God instructs Moses to bring the Levites before Him and then the Israelites are to lay their hands upon them. This was as a result of the fact that the Levites had been called to serve the Lord 'in place of... every first born male in Israel' (vv16-17). [Emphasis added]

A similar message was conveyed by the Twelve apostles when they laid their hands on the Seven, as recorded by Luke in Acts 6:1-6 [see also section c below]. The Seven were thus designated as substitutes for the apostles in their defined tasks mentioned.

c) Impartation

At the end of Moses' ministry we find two accounts of the commissioning of Joshua, who was tasked with completing the work of leading the people of God into their inheritance. In Numbers 27:20, the laying on of Moses' hands is said to be about giving Joshua some of Moses' authority. In the parallel account in Deuteronomy 34:9, the act is recorded as having brought about the filling of Joshua with wisdom.

This dual emphasis of authoritative commissioning and bestowal of spiritual gift or blessing is seen very clearly in the NT.

i) Authoritative commissioning

'And after praying, they laid their hands upon on them' (Acts 6:6), speaking about the appointment of the Seven.

And when they had [stretched out their hands] appointed elders for them in every church...' (Acts 14:23).

'Do not lay hands upon anyone too hastily' (I Tim 5:22) was Paul's injunction to Timothy, his apostolic delegate, in the context of the selection of new elders in Ephesus.

In Acts 13:1-3, Luke records that the church at Antioch, acting through some of their leaders, released Paul and Barnabas from their local pastoral and teaching responsibilities in order to obey the Holy Spirit's call to a wider trans-local ministry. They are thus commissioned and blessed as they begin this new phase of God's plan for their lives.

ii) Bestowal of spiritual gift or blessing

Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:17)

'When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying.' (Acts 19:6)

'Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed upon you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the elders.' (1 Timothy 4:14)

'...I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in through the laying on of my hands' (2 Timothy 1:6)

'And he [Jesus] took the children in his arms, laid his hands on them and blessed them' (Mark 10:16)

'And he [Jesus]...laid his hands upon a few sick people and healed them.' (Mark 6:5)

'...laying his hands on every one of them, he [Jesus] healed them.' (Luke 4:40)

'They shall lay hands on the sick and they will recover' (Mark 16:18)

Before concluding this overview about the laying on of hands, we must make the following vital qualifications. The practice will be a meaningless religious activity UNLESS firstly, it is truly at God's initiative and secondly, that it is accompanied by faith on the part of giver and receiver.

Tuesday, 3 August 2010 **'The Paradoxes of Building' – Session 7** **Scott Lencke**

Paradox =

Seems contradictory → but is true

Hold two aspects in tension → a **constant reality** within the kingdom of God

Consider some practical paradoxes as we participate with God.

1) The New and the Old

Could also be termed: **continuity** and **discontinuity**

Matthew 13:51-52

- Jesus' question: Have you understood all *these things*?
These things → the teachings on the reality of the kingdom of God
- Their answer: Yes
- Jesus' final statement about the reality of the kingdom of God → Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.

Those who understand the things of the rule of God understand the importance of both new and old.

Question: We know this passage, but do we consider its implications in our lives?

Interesting to consider: Jesus first states new and then old.

We can consider them in this order as well.

a) The New

God is the God of new things.

He is both faithfully consistent (**Hebrews 13:8**) and continually initiating new things (**Isaiah 43:16-21**).

New things did not stop with the close of the first century or the close of the canon of Scripture.

The God of new things:

- **Isaiah 42:5-9; 43:16-21** – new things
- **Isaiah 62:2-3** – called by a new name
- **Isaiah 65:17; 66:22; Revelation 21:2** – new heavens and new earth
- **Lamentations 3:21-23** – new mercies
- **Jeremiah 31:31-34** – new covenant
- **Ezekiel 36:26** – new heart and new spirit
- **Psalms 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1; Isaiah 42:10; Revelation 5:9; 14:3** – new song
- **Matthew 9:17** – pour new wine into new wineskins
- **Luke 22:20** – new covenant
- **Romans 7:6** – serving in the new way of the Spirit
- **2 Corinthians 5:17** – new creation
- **Ephesians 2:14-16** – making one new man in Christ
- **Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:10** – putting on the new self
- **Revelation 21:5** – making all things new

Other 'new things'?

- **God** is truly the God of new things. God is forever initiating new things. This is a consistent characteristic of His nature.
- **Christ** initiated the new covenant and is committed to making all things new, of which we now taste of as new creations of new birth.
- **The body of Christ** should walk in step with the heart of God, being a people who initiate new things – this is part of the apostolic heart of Christ.

New things and changes in the past:

- The Reformation
- The Anabaptists
- The work of the Spirit
- The Ephesians 4 ministries
- The rights of black humanity

Today: We need to realise that the church of the 21st century is rethinking some aspects of theology and ministry.

'The past can teach but it must never bind. The gaze must be ever forward to what God will yet do.' (Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introductory & Commentary*)

b) The Old

The problem is when we completely discard the past, for WE HAVE COME FROM SOMEWHERE.

The kingdom was not initiated with us. The plans and purposes of God did not begin with us.

Generation We (The Millennials born between 1978 and 2000)

- The website – www.gen-we.com
- The video – <http://vimeo.com/2032854>
- The book subtitle – *How Millennial Youth Are Taking Over America And Changing Our World Forever*

Jeremiah 6:16: Thus says the LORD: "Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls. But they said, 'We will not walk in it.'"

It is **NOT** about me, Jesus and my Bible.

- **We have messed up** – missed things, done wrong things, even atrocities.
- **But we have a history**, not just of 2000 years, but from the beginning.
- **We are travelling a well-worn path** – the cloud of witnesses has continued.
- **We cannot truly learn and grow today** if we do not embrace yesterday.

Check out a church history textbook.

One devotional author:

'I recall a phrase I heard years ago, speaking of the men who led the church early in the twentieth century: "Yesterday's Men." At the time I liked the phrase. A young Warrior itching for his moment, something in me said, That's right – these guys need to move over. It's our turn. In retrospect, I repent of my arrogance. For now, twenty years downriver, I hate that phrase. We need more men around who have lived through yesterday, seen it, and even if they haven't conquered it, they have learned from it.' (John Eldredge, *The Way of the Wild Heart*)

Let us both remember the 'ancient paths' and initiate 'new things' from the heart of God.

Matthew 13:51-52

2) The Small and the Big

God works in both the small and the big (and everything else in between).
We should not despise either.

a) The Small

Interesting the manner in which the kingdom of God was initiated by Christ: small mustard seed

Matthew 13:31-32: 31 He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. 32 It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches."

We are exhorted not to despise small things:

Zechariah 4:8-10: 8 Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, 9 “The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also complete it. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you. 10 For whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice, and shall see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel.”

Background to these prophetic words: **Ezra 3:10-13**

- Return from captivity
- Rebuilding the temple
- But it doesn't look like the old temple, much smaller
- Two groups of people:
 1. Younger group: excited
 2. Older group: sad

The **apostolic-prophetic-evangelistic arms of Christ** call us to extend outwards.

The **shepherding-teaching arms of Christ** call us to strengthen that which is right before us.

All big things start as small things.

‘A little thing is a little thing, but faithfulness in a little thing is a big thing.’ (Hudson Taylor)

‘Everyone wants to start a revolution but no one wants to do the dishes.’ (Anonymous)

b) The Big

We are not just part of something from the **past**, but we are also part of something **bigger** than we are.

Distinguishing **the tree** from **the forest**.

- When we are staring at the tree, we can so easily forget the forest. (The opposite is true as well.)
- This can open the door to discouragement, disillusionment, and even depression.

Not talking about ‘church growth’ or ‘mega-church’.

i) Bigger perspective on **humanity**:

Isaiah 49:5-6: 5 And now the LORD says,
he who formed me from the womb to be his servant,
to bring Jacob back to him;
and that Israel might be gathered to him—
for I am honoured in the eyes of the LORD,
and my God has become my strength—
6 he says: “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant
to raise up the tribes of Jacob
and to bring back the preserved of Israel;
I will make you as a light for the nations,
that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

Apostolic mandate of **Acts 1:8** → ends of the earth

The original mandate of **Genesis 1:26-28** → fill the earth

ii) Bigger perspective on **the church**:

Ephesians 3:10-11: 10 so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. 11 This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord

iii) Bigger perspective on **the cosmos**:

Romans 8:18-21: 18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. 19 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

Jesus is committed to making all things new: **Revelation 21:5**

God is committed to seeing His glory in all the earth: **Habakkuk 2:14**

Ephesians 3:20: Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us.

Remember the tension of the small and the big

Some other paradoxes:

3) The spontaneous ---- the process

4) The present ---- the future

Others???

Tuesday, 3 August 2010
'Rebuilding, Preparing and Restoring – Session 8
Scott Lencke

1) Rebuilding

Jeremiah 1:4-10:

4 Now the word of the LORD came to me, saying,

5 "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations."

6 Then I said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth." 7 But the LORD said to me,

"Do not say, 'I am only a youth'; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. 8 Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the LORD."

9 Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth. And the LORD said to me, "Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. 10 See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."

Interesting ministry of Jeremiah:

- 1) Pluck up, break down, destroy, overthrow
- 2) Build, plant

At times, actually many times, to get to building and planting correctly, we must first tear down that which is not in accordance a kingdom foundation.

Ephesians 2:19-22: 19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. 22 In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

There is a proper foundation, in accordance with the architectural ministry of the first apostles and prophets, which we believe such ministries are carried on even today.

Christ is the cornerstone, foundation stone of which the foundation is intricately connected to.

But, at times, we get off track:

- Build in accordance with another's pattern
- Build without eternity in view
- Build with particular 'isms' and movements in mind – see Ian Stackhouse's *The Gospel Driven Church*
- Others??

Those things must be plucked up, broken down, destroyed, overthrown.....before we begin to build and plant properly.

Thus, our ministry will, at times, take on a **rebuilding characteristic**.

Hebrews 12:26-29: 26 At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." 27 This phrase, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. 28 Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, 29 for our God is a consuming fire.

Though there will be **one final shaking at the end of the age**, there is a reality that God brings **present shakings even now as pointers** to that final shaking.

All that is to be left is that of the eternal kingdom rule of God.

Question: We mentioned some ways we get off track, but what are particular things that just might need to be shaken?

(Think **illusions** and **mirages**, which aren't really there.)

- Not having a **Christ-centred focus** on all aspects of our faith.
- Not having a **servant focus on ministry**.
- Not allowing for **all the ministries of Christ**.
- Others??

These next two aspects are centred in two prophetic aspects of John the Baptist's ministry.

Matthew 3:1-3: 1 In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, 2 "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." 3 For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said,

"The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.'"

Matthew 17:10-13: 10 And the disciples asked him, "Then why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?" 11 He answered, "Elijah does come, and he will restore all things. 12 But I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands." 13 Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist.

One passage captures both ministries:

Luke 1:16-17: 16 And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, 17 and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared. (echoing the words of **Malachi 4:5-6**)

Just as John the Baptist had these two ministries of preparing and restoring leading up to the Christ's first public appearance, so the body of Christ is to emulate these two ministries as we head towards the second and final appearance of our Christ.

2) Preparing

What does this preparatory ministry look like?

- Equipping and building up the body of Christ for ministry (**Ephesians 4:11-12**)
- Unity of the faith and knowledge of Christ (**Ephesians 4:13**)
- Maturity and full stature (**Ephesians 4:13; Colossians 1:28-29**)
- Prepared and readied bride (**Revelation 19:7; 21:2**)

See also **21:9** – *'I will show you the Bride.'*

3) Restoring

With **Malachi 4** and **Luke 1**, we see this ministry of restoration echoed in turning the hearts of fathers and children towards one another – A relational restorative aspect to this.

Ultimately restoring hearts to The Father (the ministry of reconciliation – **2 Corinthians 5:18-21**)

But the restoration ministry extends to all things:

Acts 3:19-21: 19 Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, 20 that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, 21 whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago.

Jesus will make all things new:

Revelation 21:5: And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

The renewal of the heavens (not the kingdom of heaven) and the earth (**Isaiah 65:17; 66:22; Revelation 21:2**)

The renewal of the creation/cosmos (**Romans 8:18-21**)

We taste of it even now in the new creation (**2 Corinthians 5:16-17**)

Question: What does this look like practically?

- Don't think too big just yet.
- Think stewardship of the earth → going back to **Genesis 1:26-28; 2:15**
 - Gardening (re-creation)
 - Cleaning up a street
 - Beautifying a dilapidated building
- **Creation endeavours** – taking care of that which God has given us
- **Artistic endeavours** – creativity points to the re-creativity of God
- **Educational endeavours** – not big brains, but prepared minds
- **Humanitarian endeavours** – addressing poverty, disease

This is not about the social gospel in the liberal context.

This is about the proclamation of the kingdom of God and the lordship of Jesus Christ.

Proclamation in word and deed.

- These are all pointers to the age to come, the renewal of all things
- That's why you have the younger portion of the church considering what it means to be 'green' (maybe over-obsession in some places)

How can we make known the rule of God and the lordship of Jesus?

- Let our words be followed with action.
- Let our actions be followed with our words.

This is a **holistic** approach.

The words about John the Baptist did not touch on these things!

Remember those words in the transition from old to new covenant.

Remember our call as we prepare to transition from the present age to the age to come.

Book – *Surprised by Hope* by N.T. Wright

