

2019-10-06 Immerse week 2  
Title: Power from Heaven  
Text: Acts 1:1-8, 28:23-31  
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It's been said, 'the true greatness of a leader is measured by looking at the health, or vitality, of an organization, company, division, or team six months after the leader leaves.

Jesus is arguably the greatest leader of all time and within his team of 12, one that doubted the leader's claims, one that denied the leader, and one that betrayed the leader. He had 2 brothers who instead of imitating his model of servant leadership, attempted to take the top two positions under their Master. And after Jesus leaves, we hear almost nothing about more than half of the remaining 11.

The Church of Jesus Christ is far from perfect; it's made up of broken people, who also serve as the delivery system for hope to the world.

Seriously, how can it have survived throughout the centuries and even flourished throughout history?!!

- How did the message of a resurrected Jewish man who never held a political or religious office ever escape the first century?
- How did this message overcome the jealous Jewish backlash?
- How did it break through the powerful Roman empire?
- How did it escape 70 A.D. that you probably haven't studied when Rome destroyed the Jewish temple and all the Jews were forced out of Jerusalem?
- How did a group of uneducated men and women who believed that their Jewish teacher was actually the promised Messiah become a worldwide movement that still exists 2000 years later?

There were so many obstacles...yet barrier after barrier was broken down despite human error, logic, or lack of resources, so that now over 1/3 of the whole world professes faith in Jesus Christ. And almost every first hospital, university, orphanage, and relief organization was started by Christians.

What barriers were broken down and how can this guide us as we consider the barriers we face both personally and, in Jesus' movement today?

We are going to look at 2 sets of barriers, the ones INSIDE of us and the ones OUTSIDE of us.

The inner barriers are

1. The Barriers of misconceptions, mistakes and miscommunication

Misconceptions: The book of Acts starts by telling us Jesus' team of 12 apostles, which are actually now 11, don't quite understand what's happening...

**Acts 1:6** "Lord, has the time come for you to free Israel and restore our kingdom?"

The apostles know their history and what their old prophets said. God promised to redeem Israel—their people, their nation. So it's instinctive that they would ask Jesus about this.

"Doesn't your resurrection mean the restoration of our Nation as 'top dog'?"

Jesus says, this is NOT about the kingdom of Israel being restored—

- In order for the Kingdom of Israel to be restored they would need something...actually a someone.
  - *Every kingdom needs a king (or queen)*, but in this case, God's purposes for restoring the world are for Jesus to be king and ruler of the world.

Jesus told them this is about not about *nationalistic hope* or *personal dreams*, this is about joining with Jesus to contribute to God's purposes of seeing more and more people, in more and more places, find salvation—in other words healing and hope—in Jesus Christ.

Next is the barrier of Mistakes:

After Jesus rose from the dead, the disciples were still uncertain and afraid. Jesus could have easily replaced Judas, but he doesn't. Instead he leaves them with a promise that will give them power for his mission.

- Peter is the disciple who's quick to act and quicker to speak. He's the first to declare Jesus is their Promised Savior, but also the one that tried to tell Jesus he didn't really have to give his life to save humanity.
- Peter tried, and failed, to lead in the past. Over and over in Luke's first book, Peter messes up. But Peter stands up with the apostles and disciples, and leads them to choose a replacement for Judas.

**Acts 1:15 NLT** During this time, when about 120 believers were together in one place, Peter stood up and addressed them.

**Acts 1:20-22 NLT** Peter continued, "This was written in the book of Psalms, where it says, 'Let his home become desolate, with no one living in it.' It also says, 'Let someone else take his position.'" "So now we must choose a replacement for Judas from among the men who were with us the entire time we were traveling with the Lord Jesus—22 from the time he was baptized by John until the day he was taken from us. Whoever is chosen will join us as a witness of Jesus' resurrection."

Peter, even with all his mess ups and mistakes, leads this community in prayer and with God's word to search for clues to find a way forward.

Some have speculated that since we don't hear about anything about this replacement apostle after this, that they made a mistake.

Bible scholars have debated this, and we may never know, but what I think we can learn is—regardless of replacing Judas was a success, mistake or failure—God doesn't stop working and he doesn't stop using, ordinary men and women who have been with Jesus, and have joined with Jesus to be a witness of Jesus' resurrection.

### 3. Barrier of miscommunication.

**Acts 2:5-7, 13 NLT**

5 At that time there were devout Jews from every nation living in Jerusalem. 6 When they heard the loud noise, everyone came running, and they were bewildered to hear their own languages being spoken by the believers. 7 They were completely amazed. "How can this be?" they exclaimed. "These people are all from Galilee, 8 and yet we hear them speaking in our own native languages!

13 But others in the crowd ridiculed them, saying, "They're just drunk, that's all!

Peter stands up in front of the thousands of people who are in Jerusalem for a religious festival. Peter is a witness and he gives teaching and testimony to what the people have seen and heard.

He said, "What you are witnessing today it's not crazy; the Prophets predicted this long ago—that the Messiah would suffer and die, and that happened here right outside the city, less than 2 months ago. Jesus was that man!" He lived among us, he was crucified by the Romans AND the Jewish leaders. He died for our sin and the sin of the world, even though he was innocent. It was God who declared right with God when God raised him from the dead 3 days later. Many of you were here too. We are eyewitnesses to these things. We have seen him resurrected from the dead!

When Peter finished speaking, 3000 people believed in Jesus, and a few days, maybe a week later, after the Holy Spirit performed a miracle through Peter and John, and Peter teaches again, another 2000 men accepted this belief that Jesus is the resurrected savior and the promised messiah for the Jewish people. Over 5000 men, plus women and children, put their hope in this resurrected savior!

Certainly the Day of Pentecost-when the Holy Spirit came upon all the Believers in Jesus-is about much more than communication or miscommunication, but as a personal barrier haven't you had moments where you are trying to express *something* to someone else—

regardless of whether or not it's a spiritual truth, understanding or experience—and they are just not picking up what you are putting down?

I know I'm a little unique, but I don't think I'm *unicorn special*, so this could be true for you too—There's a big difference in how I communicate when I'm overly concerned about my performance or what other's think versus when I am confident in my identity in Christ and I sense the Holy Spirits leading me. With the focused on me or what other's think, I'm tentative with my words and I don't clearly communicate what I need or want or want to see happen. When my identity is centered in Christ and I'm being led by the Spirit, I can paint a pictures with my words. I'm creative and concise. I invite others in, and invite them to contribute to the picture. I can disagree with someone, and still experience peace even in a conflict, because I'm trusting that the Spirit will unite us in Jesus and his mission.

These Inner Barriers of Misconceptions, Mistakes, and Miscommunication appear to be about performance, but they are really about identity.

When God's Spirit is poured out on us, like first disciples, we become less worried about O.P.P. (other people's opinions) or how we are performing, and more focused on *who we are representing*.

The way you break through these inner barriers is by placing the center of your identity in Jesus and choose constantly to be led by the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is not only power for the mission-what they are to do, it's relationship with God—it's also the promise from the Father. The Holy Spirit is not some impersonal force to help me/you accomplish an important task for God. The Holy Spirit is God's divine personhood coming to me/you and into me/you, to lead me/you, love me/you and help me/you experience God...

Do I think being a witness is about identity or performance?

How do you come when you to spend time with God the Father, Son and Spirit in your day? In your week? In your season? Do you come with an attitude (or regret) of performance?

God created you, loves you and wants to be in relationship with you...but not just you, He wants you and me to pursue and invite others to experience his love, truth and power.

That brings us the other set of barriers in the story of Acts and in our lives.  
The outer barriers of Problems, Persecution, and People.

## 2. Outer barrier: Problems

**Acts 6:1 NLT** But as the believers rapidly multiplied, there were rumblings of discontent. The Greek-speaking believers complained about the Hebrew-speaking believers, saying that their widows were being discriminated against in the daily distribution of food.

So the Twelve called a meeting of all the believers. These apostles were centered in Christ and led by the Holy Spirit and said, "We apostles should spend our time teaching the word of God, not running a food program."

### **Acts 6:4-6 NLT**

And so, brothers, select seven men who are well respected and are full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will give them this responsibility. Then we apostles can spend our time in prayer and teaching the word."

5 Everyone liked this idea, and they chose the following: Stephen (a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit), Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas of Antioch (an earlier convert to the Jewish faith). 6 These seven were presented to the apostles, who prayed for them as they laid their hands on them.

The leaders address the problem—they don't *ignore* it and they don't *gossip* about it. They honor those who are absent from the conversation. They accept that there's probably always another side to a story. And they believe the best about people. They listen and discern... which takes patience and prayer. They have to hold anxiety and not jump to judgement. They determine a solution, but don't fix the problem. Their solution was a process that they believed would solve the problem...which says to me, 'sometimes the best solutions mean the problem still need to be fixed.'

Who of us is problem-free? We face them at home, at work, school, in relationships, in families and in churches. The way they overcame this problem gives us wise guidance on how we can engage and overcome problems.

Remember, any one of these barriers could have easily stopped this tiny, fragile group of Jesus' people. But, centered in Christ and led by the Spirit, about news of Jesus continued to spread.

## 2. Outer barrier: Persecution

The Roman officials and the Jewish leaders have no idea what to do with this resurrection message and movement, they just know that if Rome hears of more chaos, they will send more soldiers and these leaders will be finished. So they try to intimidate the followers of Jesus. They have Peter and John beaten, and then they have Stephen stoned with rocks because he believed Jesus was alive.

**Acts 8:1 NLT** After Stephen's execution, A great wave of persecution began that day, sweeping over the church in Jerusalem; and all the believers except the apostles were scattered into the regions of Judea and Samaria.

Before the persecution these Christ centered on spirit-led people were getting really comfortable in Jerusalem. Jesus had told them they would be his witnesses *starting* in Jerusalem but going out to the ends of the earth. But it's been about 3 years and the movement hasn't really moved...they just stayed in where they started.

Does *comfort* ever keep you from living as the person Jesus has called you to be?  
Does the fear of pain, persecution, or rejection ever keep you from sharing the news of Jesus?

The story doesn't focus on the persecution, because there's always going to be some persecution. There are always going to be people that don't or won't submit their lives to Jesus. They want to be in charge of their lives and a message for someone else to lead me will not be tolerated.

The story focuses on the people who continue *in spite of the persecution*.

**Acts 8:4 NLT** But the believers who were scattered preached the Good News about Jesus wherever they went.

Wherever these people went, they kept on talking about Jesus, the one who came back from the dead and brings life to everyone. For example, a guy named Philip, who was one of the people chosen to help with the food distribution problem, goes to Judea and then Samaria. He teaches, he gives testimony, he performs miracles, and some respond to Jesus, some reject Jesus, but there is joy in that city.

Maybe you feel unequipped to be Jesus' witness, but what encourages me and I hope encourages you is who was scattered...it wasn't the A team-the apostles, it wasn't the Varsity, the Div. I, the first chairs, the lead actors—it was the second string, JV, back-up players that take center stage.

Every person began sharing the word about Jesus where ever they went. Everyone, not just a select group or a gifted few.

You don't have to wait until you're ready. We love our step-by-step plans in the western world. We want more education and more training, but often on-the-job training is the best way we learn, and when we don't quite feel ready is usually when we are the most dependent on God.

Just as Jesus promised, the spirit breaks through barriers, first the inner barriers of Misconceptions, Mistakes, and Miscommunication, and the outer barriers through problems, and persecution, to the final barrier: new people.

## 2. Outer Barriers: People

The rest of the Book describes how the Holy Spirit continued to break barriers by sending Christ-centered, Spirit-led people to more people in more places with the good news of Jesus Christ. I want you to see how the Spirit worked in this: These are some of the first people to receive faith in Jesus:

In Acts 8, The Holy Spirit takes Philip towards a new continent Africa and the first person he meets is a wealthy, gender-marginalized politician from Africa. He accepts what Philip says and becomes a believer in Jesus.

Then Holy Spirit comes to religious hater named Saul. Pieces of Saul's story are so well-known that people still use phrases today like I was blinded by the light. I was knocked off my feet. I did a complete 180. Jesus appeared to Saul in a vision but he still used a guy named Ananias to restore his sight and restore relationships with others. We will talk more about Saul next week since his letters fill about half of this book.

In Acts 10 and 11, the Holy Spirit sends Peter to a Roman army officer named Cornelius, who was a captain of the Italian Regiment. He doesn't dress like a Jew, look like a Jew or eat like a Jew, but when Peter shared the news about Jesus, he accepted it and becomes a believer in Jesus.

Then the Spirit send some new followers, Barnabas and Saul, to go from the middle east into Western Asia and even into Europe. And the very first person who receives Jesus in Europe is a wealthy business woman.

### **Acts 16:11-14 NLT**

We boarded a boat at Troas and sailed straight across to the island of Samothrace, and the next day we landed at Neapolis. 12 From there we reached Philippi, a major city of that district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. And we stayed there several days.

13 On the Sabbath we went a little way outside the city to a riverbank, where we thought people would be meeting for prayer, and we sat down to speak with some women who had gathered there. 14 One of them was Lydia from Thyatira, a merchant of expensive purple cloth, who worshiped God. As she listened to us, the Lord opened her heart, and she accepted what Paul was saying.

What about you? What barriers do you have?

Restoration was started: to transform communities. to be a gift of hope and healing and joy to the communities around us.

What is the Holy Spirit prompting you to do?

1. We can start now... ask the Holy Spirit to work in us and through us.

Everyone lived as a witness every where. It was not some complex strategy, it was normal and natural because the Spirit was leading them and Christ was in them. It's not what you do or how successful you are, it's faithfully being who God has called you to be.

## 2. Pursue diverse friendships

Matt Allinder: you have a pretty cool experience about pursuing diverse friendships...You have a friend at work who Muslim.

How did you meet?

How did you become friends?

Some people struggle with how to move from friends to friends that talk about faith. How did that work for this friendship?

Where do you see the Holy Spirit in you or him or in your friendship right now?

When we live as a witness and engage through bless practices, you will bring healing and hope and joy to those around you.