

Study 1 - Waiting and Witness

Acts 1:1-26

Prayer

Gracious God, thank you for the opportunity of meeting around your word, and allowing it to speak to our hearts. Be with us in our thinking and in our discussion, and in the fellowship that we enjoy. Amen

Overview

Having a purpose and mission statement has been a focus of the business world for many years, and having employees (and customers) who embrace it is often the difference between surviving and thriving. Take for example Microsoft's 'To empower every person and every organization on the planet to achieve more,' or Starbuck's 'To inspire and nurture the human spirit – one person, one cup, and one neighborhood at a time.'

Churches are also encouraged to have a mission statement – basically, why it exists and what its purpose is. A few examples from church websites are, 'Helping people find their way back to God,' 'Living out what we believe,' to 'Love God, Love People, Make Disciples' and to 'Know Jesus and Make Jesus Known.'

Luke has, since earliest times, been held to be the writer of this book, a doctor by profession, a companion of Paul, and the only Gentile writer in the Bible. It is not clear who Theophilus was. He could have been a lawyer or judge, or the name could be a nom-de-plume for someone who didn't want his name to be mentioned for safety's sake. Luke's aims in writing were to commend Christianity to the Roman Government, and beyond to all people. His mission statement and purpose in writing were those of Jesus, handed to the disciples as he ascended to heaven, 'to be his witnesses in Jerusalem, in all of Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth' (1:8). The disciples were certainly excited by this challenge, as Luke tells us that they worshipped Jesus and went back to Jerusalem filled with great joy (Luke 24:50-53).

There was a little uncertainty surrounding the Kingdom of God and when it might come, but the disciples may well have been thinking of 'kingdom' in political terms, rather than a time when God's will would be done on earth as it is in heaven, familiar words from the Lord's Prayer. As to Jesus' return, it is useless to speculate, as he told his disciples.

There was also unfinished business for the extended group of around a hundred and twenty disciples, including Jesus' mother and brothers. The death of Judas had left a vacancy to be filled (twelve being a divinely significant number), and Matthias, an early follower of Jesus, was chosen.

From this group of ordinary people, many of whom may never have travelled further than the boundaries of Palestine, the seed of the faith would be sown around the world.

Key Verse

'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.' (v8)

Discussion

- Q1** Which verse or thought stood out as you were reading or listening to this chapter?
- Q2** What would you suggest as a short but catchy mission statement for a church thinking about mission?
- Q3** The apostles were handed the mission of Jesus to take out into the world. Is that still our mission, and if it is then what does that say about each of us?
- Q4** Why might the apostles (as they are now called) still be focussed on an earthly kingdom, perhaps a restoration of the kingdom to Israel?
- Q5** Baptist preacher William Miller predicted Jesus would return by 1844. Thousands of followers (Millerites) sold their possessions, stopped planting crops, and gathered to prepare for the event. It became known as the 'Great Disappointment'. How should Christians handle the subject of Jesus' Second Coming?

SAMPLE

- Q6** Where are we sometimes tempted, like the apostles, to 'stand and stare' instead of moving forward?
- Q7** What stands out to you about how the believers spend the waiting period between Jesus' Ascension and Pentecost?

Q8 How does Peter handle the delicate issue of Judas?

Q9 One of the qualifications of an apostle was that they had followed and got to know Jesus. How does that relate to a description of a Christian?

Q10 What does 'to witness' mean for a Christian, and what is your own experience?

Takeaway

Where might God be calling you to wait rather than rush, and what promises of God are you being invited to trust more deeply?

Prayer

SAMPLE

*Faithful God,
teach us to wait with hope and obedience, trusting your timing rather than our own.
Fill us with expectation as we seek the work you have prepared for us.
Amen.*

'It is better to lead from behind and to put others in front, especially when you celebrate victory when nice things occur. You take the front line when there is danger. Then people will appreciate your leadership.'

(Nelson Mandela)