

Is Bill O’Riley correct...? Is the church today irrelevant...?

I am probably what most people would call a “news junkie”... The News channel is on my TV more than any other... but I am not a particular fan of Bill O’Riley. He frequently displays an arrogance and rudeness to his guests... that even when I don’t disagree with the opinion he is expressing... I frequently change the channel when he is on. It is the manner by which he expresses himself that most often disappoints me.

Thursday night... the television was on... and Bill O’Riely was giving Laura Ingram a hard time. Laura Ingram is a recent convert to Catholicism. Bill had been calling for the church to start speaking up against the positions of the president toward the war against “Islam extremism” and to engage in a letter-writing campaign to the White House. ... Laura was trying to explain to O’Riely that the church is not the arm of the state... and whenever it tries to be... it loses it’s power and it’s relevancy. ... Mr. O’Riely kept chiming in that the church already is irrelevant and powerless.

As we look at the advances of Islam today... and how Political Correctness insists that we all pretend it is a peaceful religion... and that the Crusades during the Middle Ages makes Christianity just as bad as modern day Jihad... many people in the church today have shrunk back... and are intimidated into saying nothing... and playing right along. ... In fact believers... in many cases are playing along so much... that they would never wish to imply that only the Christian church possess absolute truth.

Has current society made you to feel this way...? Do you feel awkward in our present culture... to stand on the Christian claim... that the church of Jesus Christ has the only ultimate truth...? Or do you wish that we would

hold back... as if no ideology can claim to possess absolute truth...?  
Should we act as though all religions are more or less equals in the universe of faiths...?

The current trend of our culture is an eagerness to impose its view on us... that no group should attempt to convert others to their side... out of a belief that they possess supreme... unequivocal truth. ... .. But... let me be very clear... This is exactly what Christians aim to do.

Therefore two questions have become important for contemporary Christians: "*Why do we still hold to the uniqueness of the Christian gospel?*" and, "*Why do we still proclaim Christ in this pluralistic age?*" The new sermon series that we launch today... will be an attempt to answer those questions.

Bill O'Reilly is absolutely correct – In many cases... wherever the church has conceded to political correctness... and lost it's sense of uniqueness... (abandoning its awareness that it does have the ultimate truth in the Gospel of Jesus Christ)... it has *indeed* become irrelevant... and powerless.

But... before we move forward into our new study... (because I may have raised a question in your mind about the difference between Jihad and the Crusades)... let me say this: Whenever atrocities are committed in the name of Christianity – they are committed in **DIS**obedience to the clear teaching of Jesus Christ in the Bible. But whenever atrocities are committed in the name of Islam – they are committed in obedience to the clear teaching of Mohammed in the Quran. Mohammad calls for his followers to advance his religion by forcing (upon the threat of death)

submission to it. ...”Submit or be slaughtered...!” Jihad comes straight out of the Quran.

The weapons of our warfare are also much different. ... We will see this exemplified in so many ways in our new study. ...

### **2 Corinthians 10:3-5 (ESV)**

*For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ,*

Prayer... ultimate divine truth... and behavior that is under the direction of the Holy Spirit... are our unique and powerful weapons. ... The church is irrelevant only if we drop these weapons and run like cowards. ... The church is irrelevant... if we chose to fight with an emphasis on the weaker weapons that the world uses... (We have much better weapons than hate... politics... and military might.) The weapons of Al Quiada... Isis... or the entire United States Military (for that matter)... are only sticks and stones by comparison. They might sting initially... and they can bring death... but they wont even come close to winning the ultimate war.

One of the reasons I love to study the book of Acts... is its uniqueness. It demonstrates how our unique weapons of warfare are effective for the spread of Christianity. ... (It spread and eventually conquered the mighty Roman Empire.) ... It encourages us to take up our proper weapons... which are especially needed for a time like ours... in which we are living.

Now... in setting the stage for the ultimate power we have been given... Luke... the author of the book of Acts... will in today’s passage... identify this book with his previous book. ... Both are even written to the same

recipient. Luke wrote both his Gospel... and Acts to man named Theophilus.

Acts (which is the book of our new study) forms the perfect counterpart and contrast to Luke's previous book... as well as the other three Gospels. ... In the Gospels... the Son of Man offered His life - in Acts the Son of God offered His power. ... In the Gospels we see the seed of ultimate truth - in Acts we see the effects of that seed planted (the continual spread of the Church.) ... The Gospels model the Christian life as lived by the perfect Man (Jesus Christ) - Acts models it as lived out by imperfect men. ... .. This study of Acts will be particularly important to us... because it teaches us how to experience a stimulating... exciting life — how to make our lives count.

In the opening verse of Acts... Luke expresses that his second volume is a continuation of what Christ BEGAN with His disciples... through His physical presence. ... Acts is how Christ continued what He began... by indwelling His followers through His Holy Spirit.

Some translations of the Bible title this book... “The Acts of the Apostles.” Others offer the full title as “The Acts of the Holy Spirit.” I like the second one better... but I don't think that even this is the best title. ... Much more than that... (as we will see in the opening verse)... it is about the continued acts of Jesus... through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in His followers. This book that we are about to study... is about Jesus Christ at work through the agency of the Holy Spirit inside the Apostles. ... You see... just because Christ was taken up into heaven after he returned from the dead... that doesn't mean He ceased doing and teaching. ... He continues to this

very day. This book is the continued acts of Jesus through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in His followers. ... So... lets get started...

### **Acts 1:1**

Who is Theophilus? ... We are not told... but we have, here, certain clues.

1. Theophilus is called "most excellent Theophilus" in opening of Luke's **first** book, "the Gospel of Luke." ... These words, "most excellent Theophilus," are a title of rank and honor. ... Luke employs this title again later on... in chapters 23...24... and 26... as proper titles for Felix and Festus... who were high ranking Roman officials. This is why most Bible scholars believe Theophilus must have also been a Roman official of high rank. ... With his two-volume book... Luke is deeply embedding the powerful Gospel seed into the Roman Empire.

2. Luke does not address Theophilus with the title "Most Excellent" in this second volume. The title is dropped in Acts. ... Why...? ... Again... we don't know for sure... but Theophilus was a personal friend of Luke... (close enough to correspond with Luke about the Lord Jesus.) ... He was either a man interested in knowing the truth about Christ... or else a new convert who needed to be grounded in Christ. Luke and Theophilus may have been close enough friends to be on a first name basis. ... Perhaps Luke himself had led Theophilus to Christ.

### **Acts 1:2**

What I said earlier... is based on these two verses. ... Luke's first volume describes "all that Jesus **began** to do and to teach *until* the day he was

taken up to heaven." ... And now this second volume will describe what Jesus **continued** to do and to teach (through his Spirit) *after* he was taken up.

Did you notice that verse two says that Christ gave and taught His commandments to those whom He had... what? ... Whom he had chosen. Jesus taught throngs of people... but He zeroed in on the apostles. His whole mission depended upon them. ... They were to be the first who would carry His message to the world after His departure.

Every believer is the chosen servant of God... to carry on the mission of Christ... using our proper spiritual weapons. ... Every believer is to be proclaiming the glorious message of hope... (the ultimate truth)... to a world lost and doomed to death.

### **Acts 1:3**

Luke is the only scriptural writer who tells us that Christ's post-resurrection ministry covered forty days. ... Evidently Jesus appeared at intervals... coming and going from Heaven at will... showing miraculous signs and instructing his disciples "about the kingdom of God."

Luke's record of the stunning encounter on the road to Emmaus helps us to understand what those 40 days must have been like. ... Christ met the two followers in an altered physical form... when he came to them as they returned to their home in Emmaus... and "*beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself*" (Luke 24:27)... so that they later said (Luke 24:32)... "*Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while He opened to*

*us the Scriptures?"* ... The picture we get of those forty days... is one of enraptured excitement (hearts burning within them)... suspense... and anticipation while Christ unfolded the mystery... the supreme truth.

Warren Wiersbe observes that:

Some of the believers may have had their doubts forty days before ([Mark 16:9-14](#)), but there could be no question now that Jesus had indeed been raised from the dead. To strengthen their faith, He gave them "many infallible proofs" which Luke did not explain. We know that when Jesus met His disciples, He invited them to touch His body, and He even ate before them ([Luke 24:38-43](#)). Whatever proofs He gave, they were convincing.

How wonderful that is! Jesus showed Himself alive by many infallible proofs. ... The problem of the unbeliever today is not with the facts... but with his own unbelief. ... The facts are available.

I wonder whether anyone doubts that the Battle of Waterloo was a historical event. ... (You know what?) ... I believe that Napoleon lived... and I believe that he fought the Battle of Waterloo. ... But I have very little evidence for it. ... back in High School... my history teacher... Bill Gienger told me about it... and I have read many references to it... since then. ... But when I stop to think about it... THAT is all I have! ... Actually there is ten thousand times more evidence for the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ... than there is for the Battle of Waterloo. ... There have been so many MORE writings about Jesus Christ by people who were there... and their stories circulated among those who were there... and could have denied it... if it wasn't true. These writings even circulated among those who were enemies of the Gospel who had every reason to deny it... if they could. ... And then there are all the prophecies that were

made before Christ was born. These are contained on Hebrew Scrolls that date hundreds of years before Christ.

But we still have many people today... who do not believe it. ... Where is the problem? ... The problem is in the heart... the unbelieving heart. ... Man continuously turns his back upon God. ... If you are an unbeliever... the problem is with you. ...The problem is not in the Word of God. ... He showed Himself alive by many infallible proofs. You can know if you really want to know. The problem is that you don't want to know. The problem is not in the mind - the problem is in the will.

Jesus offered many proofs... and he spoke of the Kingdom of God. The true Kingdom of God is nothing like the Caliphate... that Muslims are trying to establish by force... around the world. The Kingdom of God is not an earthly political kingdom. ... (Well... not yet... anyway. But it will one day...) The Kingdom of God will be fully realized when Jesus returns to judge all people... and remove all evil from the world. ... Until that day... the Kingdom of God exists in the present as... the Holy Spirit directed reign of Christ... in the hearts of His followers... who willfully submit to Him... and are thereby gradually transformed... from the inside out... to influence entire cultures... with Christ's love... His justice... and His mercy. ... When our hearts are in submission to Him... we are His hands and feet.

The Kingdom of God's influence on entire cultures is why we have in the world today so many hospitals... orphanages... charities... and governments that attempt to provide freedom and dignity to its citizens... Even the world's first universities... are the direct result of this influence - the Kingdom of God... in the hearts of submissive Christ-followers.



A simple look at history will affirm that the Kingdom of God... the implanted Gospel seed that takes root... (the ultimate truth that the church does possess)... is not a mere equal to the other religions of this world. ... No other has come close to such benevolent and selfless influence in the world. ... All of this... is so much a part of the DNA in the Gospel seed.

If you are a Christian... then you are part of the Kingdom of God... that Christ spoke of for the 40 days that He was with His disciples... Christ spoke of it in order to initiate its spread all over the world... after His ascension. So... if it involves you... let me repeat what this is. ... The Kingdom of God exists in the present as... the Holy Spirit directed reign of Christ... in the hearts of His followers... who willfully submit to Him... and are thereby gradually transformed... from the inside out... to influence entire cultures... with Christ's love... His justice... and His mercy.

Now... there is a power that we need... in order to participate in the Kingdom of God. ... It is not done in our own strength and ability. ... Verses 4 and 5 of Acts chapter one... deal with the necessary power.

#### **Acts 1:4**

The “promise of the Father” is the power that we need. Our entire passage this morning... is a summary of what Luke has already written in chapter 24 of His Gospel.

#### **Luke 24:45-49 (ESV)**

*Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am*

*sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”*

The Father’s promise of power... is the Holy Spirit... which they were to wait for in Jerusalem. ... This would not necessarily be where they wanted to stay. ... They were from Galilee... and Jerusalem was hostile to Christ... during that time. ... But God's commands are to be obeyed... whether they are easy... or hard... liked... or not liked.

Also... waiting... is very difficult at times. Our natural self doesn’t like to wait. The flesh... wants immediate gratification. ... We want instant answers to our prayers... and speedy relief from our woes... But let me remind you of a very important truth... even though it may not be what you want to hear. ... Waiting is often a prerequisite to blessing. ... (Waiting is often a prerequisite to blessing.) ... God is far more interested in our holiness than He is in our happiness. ... Waiting is often God’s way of developing holiness. AND...

**Isaiah 40:31 (ESV)**

*...they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.*

But why Jerusalem...? What is so important about waiting there...? Why couldn’t they go home to Galilee...?

One of the reasons... may have been to fulfill an Old Testament prophecy...

**Isaiah 2:3 (ESV)**

*and many peoples shall come, and say: “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.” For out of Zion shall go the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.*

Some Bible Scholars point to that verse in Isaiah and say it was to fulfill that prophecy. ... I tend to believe... however... that Isaiah 2:3 is prophecy that will be fulfilled when Christ returns... and establishes the full Kingdom of God here on earth. That is sure to happen!

In a few days... from Christ's command to wait... Jerusalem would experience what some have estimated as millions of Jews... swelling the city from all over the world... who would be there for the Jewish celebration of Pentecost. ... That **was** when the Holy Spirit came. ... God had perfectly arranged the inauguration of the Kingdom of God... to occur in the midst of myriads of people from every tribe and nation of the known world. ... With great power the Gospel went forth... hearts from many nations submitted to Christ's rule in their life. ... But this is getting a little ahead of ourselves...

### **Acts 1:5**

I sometimes like to try and imagine myself in the scene of Bible events. ... Imagining myself among the believers as they waited... just as Jesus instructed... I can almost hear the conversations. They must have been very confused. They could not have known what was about to happen.

*What is this baptism "with the Holy Spirit"? ... Is Jesus going to take us to the Jordan and rebaptize us? ... Will we hear another voice out of Heaven like Jesus did? ... Will we be given supernatural powers? ...* It is not hard for me to imagine Peter wanting to go through walls just like the Master had done.... ... At some point... the conversation must certainly must have turned to what all the Rabbis had said about the restoration of Israel's political fortunes. They taught that it would be marked by the revived activity of God's Spirit. ... In the passage we will study next week... it is

clear that the disciples burned with the hope of a political theocracy... like the days of David and Solomon. ... *What will be MY duties? ... Will I be in charge of a lot of cities...? Certainly each of us will have a special mission marked with incredible power and great success. ... How long before this would happen? ... Jesus said, "In a few days." ... Well... I can hardly wait!*

In a few days... Jesus would ascend back into heaven... and after that... the Holy Spirit would come... as promised. ... If Jesus had stayed on earth... His physical presence would have limited the spread of the Good News... because physically He could be in only one place at a time. ... After Christ was taken up into heaven... He would be spiritually present everywhere through the Holy Spirit. ... The Holy Spirit was sent so that God would be with... and within His followers... after Christ returned to heaven. ... The Spirit would comfort them... guide them to know His truth... remind them of Jesus' words... give them the right words to say... and fill them with the necessary power.

Acts chapter one demonstrates for us... that that our Kingdom work should not be attempted... apart from the Spirit's enablement. ... It is easy for us to get distracted and find security in other things that serve as substitutes to the power of the Spirit. ... Excellent programming... using the best of modern technology... church growth and management techniques... along with building facilities can produce impressive results. ... Someone once said that 95 percent of what happens in many evangelical churches could be done without the Holy Spirit.

I had been 1 year out of seminary and in my first church pastorate. I had the opportunity to go and visit the man who mentored me while I went to

seminary. I had served as an intern to him... in a large Portland area church. In the year that I had been away... my mentor had resigned from the church where I had worked with him. He started a seeker-friendly church that was greatly influenced by the church-growth movement... that attempted to reach the lost by avoiding anything that might offend a non-believer. Worship services were man-oriented... instead of what worship truly is – God centered. ... Anyway... his new church met inside a movie theater on Sunday mornings... before the theater opened for its usual business. ... I was excited to see my mentor again... and also to see several other former staff members from the church we all served in a year ago. ... Wow! The Sunday morning service was top quality. I have never heard music played so professionally in a church. (They may have even had a harpist.) ... My friend, Steve, put on a very creative drama presentation that ripped my emotions right out of my heart. ... His wife sang a solo with a golden voice. ... And then the pastor... who I had interned for... gave a talk (without using the Bible, because the Church-growth movement said Bible verses offend non-believers.) It was a very entertaining talk about how to succeed in life. ... After the whole thing was over... I waited to talk with my former mentor. The crowd of maybe 100 people had left... and my mentor and I sat down beside the popcorn machine in the lobby to talk. (The theater staff had come in to prepare for their matinees.) My mentor was obviously embarrassed. It turns out that he was greatly disappointed by the crowd of only 100 people. We had previously ministered together in a much larger church. With his head hung low... he said... “I just don’t get it! You saw the quality we put out today. We do this every week... and this is all we get!... Where are all the people...? They’re just not coming.

You know... I have often wondered... If the crowds did come... would that be evidence of the Kingdom of God...? I don't think so.

Many people will come to these churches attracted by the comprehensive program the church offers. People want a weekly religious dose... and... in our entertainment-oriented culture... a church that provides an entertaining program will attract people. But so will a good concert... or a woman's mud wrestling sporting event... or cage fighting. ... There is so much that we can do to attract people. ... But Christian ministry is ministry in the Spirit. Without the Spirit's power... our excellent programs are ultimately futile. A big church that we see on TV may... or may not be part of the Kingdom of God.

So whoever we are and whatever we do for God... our great desire should be to be filled with God's Spirit so that our work will spring from his resulting power. ... As Jacob did when he faced the challenge of meeting his brother Esau... we must cry out... *"I will not let you go unless you bless me"* (Gen. 32:26).

This attitude is well expressed in a story that Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones told about an old Welsh preacher who was preaching at a convention in a small town. ... The people were already assembled... but the preacher had not come. ... So the leaders sent someone back to the house to fetch him. ... She came back and reported that he was talking to somebody... and she did not want to disturb him. ... They said... *"That is strange because everybody is here. Go back and tell him that it is after time and he must come."* She went again and returned with the same report: *"He is talking to somebody."* ... The leaders asked, *"How do you know that?"* ... She

answered... "I heard him say to this other person who is with him, 'I will not go and preach to these people, if you will not come with me.'" ... Suddenly the wise leaders felt... that neither should they disturb him until he was ready.

No man or group of men is powerful enough to spread the Kingdom of God without the Holy Spirit. Could we ever convince others of the *foolishness of the gospel*...

- that love is more powerful than might.
- that God's Son actually came to earth as a man.
- that God's Son died but was raised from the dead, conquering death.
- that the cross is the way men are saved from sin, death and hell.
- that man can be *born again*, literally born again and made into a new creature by *believing* in Jesus.
- that man can live forever by being born again through belief in Jesus.

Christ knew that we need a supernatural power... the power of God Himself. He knew that the very presence of God's Spirit has to *enter into* the very heart of man. ... So over the course of the next several weeks... we are going to study the coming of this great power. It is my prayer... that you will not feel the need to shrink with intimidation... because of our world's current events. Our weapons are more powerful.