

Our Unique Position

Upside Down

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There's one place in your Bible that most readily comes to mind, it's the book of Acts and I want to encourage you this morning to turn to the book of Acts 1. This season of our church's life, we're going to walk through what we know as the book of Acts very steadily, very systematically and kind of what we're going to pivot around is found in Acts 17. Now we're going to be in chapter 1 today but in Acts 17, I want to describe a scene for you. The early church is about two decades old. Sure, the apostles are ministering throughout the land, we have the rise of local leadership, we know there have been thousands of people who have been saved and baptized, but in Acts 17 there becomes an incident where those in the community are upset, those that have positions of power have become unnerved because what we know as the message of Jesus Christ has taken the land by fire. In fact, there in Acts 17, we discover there's a man by the name of Jason. He's not listed as an apostle, a deacon, or a pastor, an elder anywhere else in the Bible but he's mentioned by name several times there, and in verse 6, those who are so struggling with the message of Christianity make this revolutionary statement, "These men have turned the world upside down."

Now I want you to think about that for just a moment. I don't know about you but I live in a world right now that I wish looked a little different than it does right now. I live in a world right now that I wish that some things that aren't advocated were and some things that are were not. So how is it that our world the Lord can turn upside down? I think one of the faults we have with the book of Acts is we go back and we read through it and we say, "Well, that was then but this is now." One of the things I hope that you discover as we walk through the book of Acts this season is that in principle you and I have access to everything that the early church had access to, in fact, there are items that you and I, we're going to discuss this today, that we have access to that can you imagine what they could have done with what we currently possess.

In Acts 1 today, we're going to begin in verses 1 through 14 and we're going to address our very unique position, one that is eerily similar to the early church. It says,

1 The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, 2 Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles

whom he had chosen: 3 To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God: 4 And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. 5 For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. 6 When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? 7 And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. 8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. 9 And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. 10 And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; 11 Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven. 12 Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey. 13 And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. 14 These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.

Ladies and gentlemen, that's how it all started. I mean, think about it, 20 years later those who are in power, those in authority are claiming that the world has been turned upside down. How on earth did a group of about 100+ people in an upper room scared for their physical lives, how did the world get turned upside down? How can you and I see our worlds turned upside down individually, collectively, even within our communities?

So today I want you to see as we begin this journey through the book of Acts, that there are some certain aspects that are very similar. In fact, one of the things I want to state this morning is that we hold the same position. Now position is critical. Now you know I'm a sports fan so forgive me for another sports analogy but whatever your sport of choice may be, it doesn't matter if it's baseball, football, basketball, volleyball, it doesn't matter what your sport of choice may or not be, this one thing you do know is that if you find yourself out of position you can't make the play. There's no way. In fact, it doesn't matter how skilled you are, how much you've trained, how much you've prepared, how much film you've studied, if the play is going to go to the right side and you're lined up on the left, you're not going to be a part of it. Why? Because you're out of position. And today when we compare ourselves to the early church, think about the "skill sets" we possess, think about the buildings that we're even seated in here this morning, the technology that allows us to reach literally around the globe. We have all of the trappings of earthly

means but would you confess with me that when it comes to making a difference with the gospel of Jesus Christ we're out of position because it seems like that every day the ball just keeps getting run right by us, doesn't it?

So what I want you to discover today is the position that as a believer in Jesus Christ you hold because you hold the same position that the early believers did and yet possess a greater skill set. Can I just share one with you? Right now whether you're old school like I am with a paper copy or you've got a Bible on your phone, your laptop, whatever it may be, you realize that the early believers didn't have this. They didn't possess it. In fact, the letters of the Apostle Paul had not even been written in Acts 17. Half the New Testament had not even been inspired, much less preserved by God, yet they turned the world upside down. We can talk about our buildings, we can talk about all of our trappings, we've even got an entire copy of the Bible and yet we don't see what they saw in their day.

So how do we make sure that we're in the right position? The first thing we need to do is understand the proof that we possess. Notice what it says there in verse 1 and 2, that this Jesus Christ from the moment that which he began to do and to teach and was caught up. Now the Lord used the same instrument to give us what we know as the book of Acts as he did the gospel of Luke but what I find intriguing there is the parameters or, shall I say, the means by which are given. It says if you want proof that you're in the right position, just look to the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

Think about how it starts. The very first miracle, John 2, Jesus turns water into wine and it's at that event where his earthly mother Mary and him have a conversation and she says something to him and his response is this, "Woman, it is not yet mine hour." Now why is that important? Because that phrase is all throughout the gospel of John. When it says the hour of Jesus Christ, it means the crucifixion, it means the resurrection, it means the Passion Week. In fact, that same chapter, as soon as the wedding has come to a conclusion, Jesus goes into the Temple Mount, he cleanses the temple, he overthrows the tables and he makes this statement that the temple will be destroyed and he'll build it back in three days. They marvel at him, how could this happen? It took 46 years to build, you're going to build it back in three days? And it says and after his resurrection, they realized, they understood that he meant his body. In fact, from the very first miracle, from the very first teachings that we have from the mouth of Jesus Christ, it is all centered upon what we know as the resurrection. If Jesus Christ is not raised from the dead, then our faith is in vain. If you place your life as a believer in Jesus Christ in any position other than at the empty tomb, you're going to be out of position real quick. And yet it's easy to get off-base, it's easy to get on the wrong side because we like to make it about everything else. In fact, in Matthew 12, those who were contrary to the message of Jesus Christ, contrary to him as an individual said, "Do you know what? Jesus, it would be real nice if you'd give us a sign. It would be real nice if you would do something more than walking on water or healing the sick and the lame." He said, "You want a sign? I'll give you a sign, as Jonah was in the belly of the whale three days and three nights, so the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights." Jesus Christ claimed his entire message on an empty tomb.

Now notice what it says in verse 3, many infallible proofs after his resurrection. This is critical to understanding our position, this is critical to understanding the proof that we possess. Think about his resurrection, not just the facts therein but think about in Matthew 27, that those individuals that were so contrary to Jesus actually paid off a bunch of Roman soldiers to lie, to say that his disciples stole his body. So you've got Roman soldiers who witnessed a resurrection, you've got those who were contrary to him witnessing a resurrection, the women that were there at the tomb so believed it they went and got Peter and John, they ran back to the empty tomb and according to 1 Corinthians 15, it says up to 500 people saw him raised from the dead. That, my friends, we just sang about a miracle, you want a miracle? 500 believers who all have the same story. That's a miracle. You say you don't believe me? Can I give you the communication means here? We had a telegraph and we have a telephone, nowadays we just have tele-Baptist and, boy, can it go sideways quick. Can you imagine 500 Baptists who all get their stories straight? If you don't believe in miracles, that's a miracle.

And yet it says 500. The enemies of Jesus claimed he rose from the dead. The believers in Jesus staked their eternity on it. Even the great historians of the day whether Jewish in background or Gentile, claimed the fact that his believers and there is evidence of his resurrection. You see, when we talk about turning the world upside down, hear me clearly, if we ever find our desire for change anything other than the resurrection, we're out of position. The world does not change – listen to me, some of you are going to get upset but work with me – the world does not get turned upside down by our political dispositions. The world does not get turned upside down by our socioeconomic prowess. It is turned upside down when we center it on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That is the proof and all that we need because that's all the early church had.

The second thing is this, beginning in verse 4: there's a person that is involved. Notice what it says, "being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence." When we talk about being in the right position, that position is centered on the proof of what we know as the resurrection and the empty tomb but the world will never be turned upside down with the gospel apart from the person and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Now I know that's a phrase, a description, a title, that can make us old school Baptists just a little bit nervous and let me tell you why, because when the Holy Spirit moves you don't get to control it and that's why we get nervous because we like to be in control, we like to have parameters, we like to have spreadsheets, we like to have everything at our disposal but when the Lord moves, you don't have the right to change, alter or address. He just moves. Now that's very extensive, in fact, when you start looking at what the Bible addresses with the person and the movement of the Holy Spirit, you've got to go all the way back to the very first verse of the very first book. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Verse 2, "And the earth was formless and void and the Spirit of God moved upon the waters." Isn't that interesting? Before we ever hear the phrase "Let there be light," the Spirit of God was moving. In fact, you get into Genesis 2 and 3

and we have the formation of Adam and Eve, particularly Adam coming from the dirt. And when Adam comes from the dirt, the Bible says that the Lord breathed his Spirit in him and he became a living soul. It is the Spirit of God that preceded the creative order. It is the Spirit of God that preceded the human order. And in Genesis 6 when Noah and that whole flood issue is taking place, what does the Lord say? "My Spirit shall not always strive with man but for 120 years."

What was he saying? He was saying that humanity, much like Matthew 19:26, we can do nothing apart from him, and as you walk through the entirety of your Bible, you will discover that the Lord moves through his Holy Spirit. And yet here, I want you to notice that the world was turned upside down not because of their skill set, not because of their access to means but because they did what he told them to do, they waited and they yielded on the Holy Spirit.

Now what's intriguing to me is that phrase "Holy Ghost." Now many of your Bibles say Holy Ghost, some will use the phrase "Holy Spirit," and I know it sounds a little bit archaic but let me walk down that road for just a moment. In your New Testament, that phrase what we know as "Holy Spirit" is used 77 times, and many of your Bibles, mine included, the phrase "Holy Ghost" is used 71 out of the 77 times. You say, "Well, why is that? Why would we use that phrase?" Because back in John 14 and 16, Jesus made it very clear, he said, "It's actually expedient and it's actually good that I depart from you for when I depart from you, I will send another, I will send a Comforter unto you, the Spirit of truth who will convict you of sin and righteousness and judgment." Here's what Jesus was saying, he was saying that, "When I ascend," what we just read, "that the presence of the Lord will not be any less in my absence when the Comforter arrives." Why is he referred to as "Holy Ghost"? Every time you see that phrase in your New Testament, it is the person of the Holy Spirit as if the person of Jesus Christ has never departed. Why is that critical? We talk about turning the world upside down, we talk about things changing in our life, the person of the Holy Spirit moving and operating in our lives as if Jesus Christ is with us wherever we go.

Speaking of wherever we go, go to verse 8. I want you to notice this very famous verse, one of the Great Commission passages in the Bible. He said, "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you." In other words, when you're living a life surrendered and yielded to the Lord as if Jesus is there, "ye shall be [my] witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." Now if you want kind of the 30,000 foot view of that. In Acts 2, the Holy Spirit will be poured out on the Jews in Jerusalem and Judea. In Acts 8, it will be poured out on the Samaritans. And in Acts 10, it will be poured out on the Gentiles, those that are at the uttermost. And we could look at it theologically, of course, and we can also look at it geographically but one thing I want you to notice is this, that the Lord makes it very clear that when we're in the right position, when we're centering our life on an empty tomb, when we're yielded to the Holy Spirit, the Holy Ghost in our lives, it doesn't matter where you go, he makes a move. It doesn't matter. You can be in Jerusalem. You can be in Samaria. You can be in the furthest stretch of the uttermost.

It reminds me of Joshua 1. Remember the Israelites are about to enter the Promised Land, as they're about to go across what we know as the Jordan River, the Lord makes this very famous statement in Joshua 1, he says, "Wherever you place your foot, know that I have gone before you." Kind of the same means here. He said, "It doesn't matter that if you're in the schoolhouse, the courthouse, the White House, or your friend's house, if you are there, then I am there." In fact, I think one of the travesties that we've fallen into in what we might call the modern church environment is we think that somehow that God is in greater concentration in this location versus that location, in this place versus that place. But what was he saying here? He says, "Go to Jerusalem. Go to Samaria. Go to the uttermost. It doesn't matter where you go in the power of the Holy Spirit, it's as if I'm there."

Now think about this. Think about the world that they lived in 2,000 years ago, a world that had systematic persecution of believers, one of which the percentages of believers was very minuscule, and yet they turned the world upside down. They didn't have big buildings or large campuses. They didn't have multimedia ministries. But they did center their lives on the empty tomb and they did walk and move in the power of the Holy Ghost.

So what's the promise for you and I? How can this be something more than just a history lesson? How can this be greater than just what happened then? How can this be reality for us? I want you to go to verse 13. By the way, I know I stopped at verse 14 earlier but I'm going to go on to verse 15. It says,

13 And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. 14 These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren. 15 And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty,)

Now think about that. Now that's actually a miraculous number because according to John 19, when Jesus Christ was on the cross there were only five people at the foot of the cross that actually believed in him, so to go from five to 120 is miraculous but think about the population of the day and there's only 120. And yet how many of us have a defeatist attitude when it comes to our faith? We look at the world that is around us, we look at the situations that we walk through, and yet 120, a number that could actually be fit in one single solitary upper room.

Now I want you to notice how extensive this is. Of course, the apostles were there minus Judas and that's a story literally for the end of this chapter and for this evening. But we know the apostles are there. We know that beyond the 12 apostles there were the 70 that would go out two by two and others. So most likely there is a collection of those individuals. It says there that even the women, not just those four that were at the foot of

the cross but I'm sure many others were gathered. Why is this critical? Because I think when we talk about the world being turned upside down, when we talk about a difference and a change being made to wherever we find ourselves, we often say, "Well, I'm not one of them, or if I was one of them or if I had their whatever it may be." You know one of the passages that I love in the book of Acts is in chapter 3. The first wave of persecution has come through and they look at Peter and James and John and these early believers and they said, "These men are ignorant and unlearned yet we can tell that they have been with Jesus." What a statement. How often will we say, "Well, I'm not a teacher. I'm not a theologian, I'm not a pastor, I'm not an influencer, I'm not a this, I'm not a that." The question isn't do you possess the skill set, the question is have you spent time with Jesus? They spent time with Jesus and the world was turned upside down. It didn't matter whether they'd been with the journey for all three years or for three months. It didn't matter if they were to go to the Jewish temple, which court they would be placed in, the Jewish, the Gentile, the male or the female. Like Galatians 3 says, the veil has been torn, the church has been established.

But one thing I want you to know is not only how exhaustive but how exhausting this must have been. I want you to go back to verse 4 and hear what Jesus said to them, "I want you to go to the upper room and I want you to wait." Now the only thing that can come to my ears that is worse than "wait" is "be quiet," to be honest with you. You tell me to be quiet and to wait, I'm going to bounce off a padded wall, but that's okay. But think about that "wait," and I want you to look at verse 4, I want you to notice did the Lord say wait for seven days? He didn't, did he? He didn't even say wait for 40 days. I mean, after all, that's used all throughout the Bible, 40 days, 40 nights, Noah's flood, Jesus in the wilderness with the temptation, there's a lot of different things. There's no timeframe that is given. He said, "Just wait." Wow. Therein may lie the linchpin of our struggle today. How often do we want to get ahead of God? How often when he hasn't spoken, we want to speak? How often do we say, "Well, if I were God," fill in the blank? What does he say unto them? What's the promise? He said, "If you're a believer in me then you'll just wait." But what did they do in verse 14? It says they were in one accord in prayer.

Now the next chapter is probably the most famous event in the book of Acts, it's called Pentecost. The Holy Spirit comes down and is poured out, what we know is the outward expression of the early church hits the scene. Here's what's interesting. They prayed for seven days. They did not know what the timeframe was, they just did what he said for seven days. If you'll read Acts 2, in the sermon that Peter preaches it takes the average person 3-4 minutes to read it. I can do it in about 2, just to be honest with you. Why is that important? Think about that in today's terminology. Most of us if we would confess, myself included, we pray for three minutes and we think that talking for seven days will fix it. But that's not what they did. They prayed for seven days and in 2-4 minutes God changed the world forever.

Here's what's fascinating: we're in the same position. There is nothing they had access to that we don't. In fact, if there's anybody that holds the advantage, it's us. We have the facilities, we have the buildings, we have the resources, we have the technology, the

problem is we rarely center on the resurrection. The problem is we rarely go in the power of the Holy Spirit and rarely are we willing to wait it out and pray it through. I don't know about you but I would love to see our world turned upside down but it's not going to happen unless we do it the way they did.