

Acts

Acts 1:9 to 2:37 - A Holy Spirit full of surprises

In the first eight verses of Acts Chapter One we learn right off the bat what the church is for, or what it means to be “church.” Primarily we are church to witness to Jesus being alive and continuing his ministry, which our “baptism with the Spirit” makes possible (verse 5). It’s a new era in Jesus’ ministry opening up and it’s **full of surprises**.

Jesus kicks off this new era in his ministry with “many convincing proofs” that he’s alive over a period just shy of six weeks, at the end of which he’s lifted up and disappears from the apostles’ sight. “Two men dressed in white” then announce that Jesus has been “taken into heaven,” but he’ll be coming back to the earth in his recognizable human form later (verse 11).

Well, that was the first surprise for the apostles, because how could an eating, speaking human **enter heaven**? Isn’t heaven only for those who shed their physical bodies and take on a sort of ghostly form without a body? That’s the picture given by most Christian churches today, that we go to heaven permanently as disembodied souls after we die. But here in Acts Jesus is taken into heaven and the apostles are told he’ll come back from heaven in the **same human form** they’d seen him in for the last six weeks. So heaven is a place in space and time that even an eating, speaking human body can enter.

That kind of heaven, then, can’t be the place where God has “lived” for eternity, because he is outside space and time. He must have created this heaven, therefore, just like he had the tabernacle set up in the wilderness and the temple built in Jerusalem, as places he could be **present in** so that humans could enter into his presence and communicate with him.

And the same goes for the heaven that Jesus entered, because it too is where God is present, as we see in Jesus entering this heaven to be “seated at God’s right hand,” **Colossians 3:1**. So in this heaven Jesus is able to enter into God’s presence - as a human. And amazingly this is what’s happened to us too, because in the first part of Colossians 3:1 Paul writes, “Since, then, **you have been raised with Christ**.” So we’re in this heaven too, thanks to Jesus uniting us with him and entering God’s presence “on our behalf” (Hebrews 9:24). It sets us up beautifully in this new era of Jesus’ ministry, knowing we have this kind of communication with God made possible.

And if we're in any doubt that this is what Paul meant, he spells it out again for us in **Ephesians 2:6**, that God "raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms." So that's where we are now as humans, along with Jesus as a human; we're in this other "realm" that enables both Jesus and us as humans to be in God's presence and in close contact with him.

Imagine hearing that for the first time. I remember vividly when I first heard Ephesians 2:6, on a cassette tape while driving down the highway, and I nearly drove off the road I was so shocked. You mean, we're in heaven already, seated with Christ, who - as we know from Acts 1:11 - was raised into this heaven as a human being, and therefore so are we. And one day, in **Colossians 3:4**, Jesus will come back to earth from this heaven, still as a human being, bringing us with him from this same heaven as human beings too.

Well, it was armed with the "many convincing proofs" that Jesus was alive still and he was hanging out in human form in this heavenly realm - and that he was coming back one day in his human form from that heaven - that the apostles followed Jesus' instructions to head back to Jerusalem and wait to be "clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49).

But **why would they need this power from on high?** Because in this new era of the Holy Spirit Jesus' ministry would be going to the whole world (verse 8). The focus of Acts in Chapter One, then, is that while Jesus is in heaven he is continuing his ministry on earth worldwide, which would take both time and power. And that must have been a huge surprise for the apostles, because they thought the new age of the kingdom of God being restored in Israel would begin with the arrival of the Messiah. The Messiah had already come, however, and with astounding miracles by Jesus to prove the Messiah was him. But instead of the wonderful new age beginning right away, the apostles were being told to wait for power, because there was going to be **a period of time** set aside for getting the message of the kingdom of God out to the whole world before this age ends and the new age begins. It was another surprise they hadn't expected.

In Jerusalem, meanwhile, the remaining eleven apostles had met up with Jesus' mother and brothers, and several other women, where it's clear the seriousness of their assignment had hit them, because they were all "constantly in prayer" (verse 14). They certainly weren't going to leap out on their own strength, in other words, and especially when they had no idea how and where the Spirit would be leading them. And they got their first taste of that when number one on the Holy Spirit's agenda was choosing an apostle to replace Judas the betrayer.

The Holy Spirit was simply following up on what he'd "spoken long ago" about replacing Judas "through the mouth of David" (Acts 1:16, 20), because it would be another obvious sign that this was a continuation of Jesus' ministry: Jesus had chosen twelve disciples originally, so twelve it would continue to be.

And it was notably through Peter that the Spirit inspired the thought of the twelfth apostle (verse 15), because it was Peter whom Jesus had singled out to "feed his sheep" and lead the church. So, again, the Spirit was following up on Jesus' ministry, in having Peter take the lead. So the Spirit wasn't leaping out on his own initiative either. He was totally tuned in to what Jesus had started when he was here on the earth, which must've been very encouraging to the apostles, that Jesus' ministry was continuing through them as his core group of twelve.

It was also being made clear that the church wasn't going to be a clinical, man-made organization; it would be Jesus and his chosen ones still working in close ministry together, just like they had been. And how different this would be from the typical religious institutions of this world based on human ideas, human management and human tradition. The church, by contrast, would be a wonderful witness to how the kingdom of God functions, with God and humans working in close relationship together.

And there you have the key to OUR witness to Jesus being alive in our world today. It's not running the church like a business with all sorts of programs for growth, it's waiting on the Holy Spirit to make us an effective witness, because he knows best what direction to take us in to do that. And what better illustration of that than the apostles dutifully waiting for several weeks for the Holy Spirit as Jesus instructed, and resisting the temptation to leap out on their own initiative. They totally trusted in the Spirit's timing and lead.

And that was good, because none of them would have remotely guessed that the Holy Spirit would arrive like "the blowing of a violent wind," with fire that looked like forked lightning landing on each of them, and all of a sudden they could speak in all sorts of languages (Acts 2:1-4). Before they could even speak a word, however, there was fire first. And it landed on each of them. Why? Because fire in Scripture is symbolic of purifying and cleansing. The apostles knew, then, that they'd been given a clean bill of health and approval for the next era of Jesus' ministry.

But right after their symbolic cleansing, what happened? The Holy Spirit gave the apostles the ability to explain what was happening in all the languages of their audience (2:6-11).

We learn very quickly, then, that the Holy Spirit is the great EXPLAINER. He makes sure that those he's aiming his message at understand what's being said in terms and language they can relate to (Acts 2:11). And that's good to know because we're also learning in the book of Acts that the Spirit is the great MIND-BLOWER too, who says and does such surprising things that explanation in understandable terms is needed.

The reason for the Holy Spirit being such a mind-blower, and so quickly in the book of Acts, was because those Jews needed their attention grabbed and their brains swept out in **preparation for hearing things totally new to them**. So it's no surprise if the same thing happens to us. We can expect our minds to be blown too, and in ways that grab our attention and sweep our brains out in readiness for new understanding as well, and especially as we go through the book of Acts, which has so much new understanding being introduced.

Some in the crowd have been so blown away, meanwhile, that rather than wait for an explanation they resort to making fun of the apostles, accusing them of being drunk (verse 13), which stirs Peter to say, "**let me explain this to you**" in **verse 14**. So now comes the Holy Spirit the great Explainer again showing there's nothing strange going on here at all, because it had all been predicted already by the prophet Joel. It's all explainable, therefore, from God's word, if they were ready and willing to listen.

The Holy Spirit chooses the book of Joel, because the Jews were expecting all these signs and wonders in verses 17-21 (quoting Joel) to occur at the coming of the Messiah. So if Jesus was truly the Messiah why didn't these signs and wonders happen when he came?

And that's when the Holy Spirit drops a real mind-blowing bombshell; that Scripture had predicted the Messiah would be killed instead, and that they, the Jews, had killed him (2:22-23). But the great sign and wonder - that God had ready and waiting up his sleeve to prove Jesus truly was the Messiah after all - was resurrecting him back to life again, just as Scripture had also predicted (2:24-35). "Therefore," **verse 36**, "let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

This was so shockingly mind-blowing, and especially since it had been there all along in Scripture as well, that the Jews were "cut to the heart" and all they could think of saying was, "Brothers, what shall we do?" It was a clear example of the Spirit knowing exactly what needed to be said, how and when, to get through to plugged up brains. So the Holy Spirit is also the great MIND OPENER - as another vital part of Jesus' ministry WE can expect now too.