

3) After he (Jesus) had suffered, he also presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. 4) While he was with them, he commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for the Father's promise. *"Which," he said, "you have heard me speak about;* 5) *for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit in a few days."* 6) So when they had come together, they asked him, *"Lord, are you restoring the kingdom to Israel at this time?"* 7) He said to them, *"It is not for you to know times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority.* 8) *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."* 9) After he had said this, he was taken up as they were watching, and a cloud took him out of their sight. 10) While he was going, they were gazing into heaven, and suddenly two men in white clothes stood by them. 11) They said, *"Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up into heaven? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come in the same way that you have seen him going into heaven."*

Herschel Hobbs called it "the Gospel in a verse." Every Christian in this room can quote John 3:16. *"For God loved the world in this way: He gave His One and Only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life (zoe aionios)."* Jesus provided concise commentary later in John 10: *"I am the door. If anyone enters by Me he will be saved and will come in... A thief comes only to steal and to kill and to destroy. I have come that they may have life and have it in abundance....I am the good shepherd...My sheep hear my voice, I know them, and they follow Me. I give them (zoe aionios) eternal life, and they will never perish – ever! No one will snatch them out of My hand."* (John 10:10-11; 27-28) The Apostle Paul summarized it in one statement: *"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is (zoe aionios) eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

Here's my question: If, at the moment we give our heart and our life to Jesus Christ through a personal profession of our faith, God gives to us eternal life, so that, as John affirmed in I John 5:13 that we can know that we have eternal life, why then, does God leave us behind? Why not take us right on to heaven so that we may enjoy this eternal life? The narrative of Acts 1 confirms the reasons.

1. **We are Left Behind to WITNESS.** We call it the Acts 1:8 challenge: *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses...* The first Christians were left behind to witness, and the implication is that we are left here to witness. **Witnessing Matters.** Two words grab our

attention. **Dunamis** = power, defining strength, influence, ability. Our strength, influence and ability to witness is empowered by the indwelling and infusion of the Holy Spirit. How does this happen? Rewind to verse 5: *“for John (the Baptist) baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”* An interesting and unusual directive. Here were the followers of Jesus, the eyewitnesses to Jesus’ evangelistic actions and ministry initiatives – eyewitnesses to Jesus’ powerful words of truth and theology – eyewitnesses to His instructions in ethics, worship, and ministry. On specific occasions, Jesus sent them out for supervised ministry and evangelistic experiences. And yet, all of this eyewitness, first-hand, superb training had not equipped them completely. Something was missing and that something is a someone – the Holy Spirit.

Just a few hours before His death, Jesus announced to His disciples, that though He was leaving them, *“I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counselor to be with you forever. He is the Spirit of truth.”* (John 14:16). Two expressions in the Book of Acts are used interchangeably to refer to this indwelling and infilling of the Holy Spirit. Jesus inferred here in Chapter 1 that they would be *“baptized with the Holy Spirit”* and that they would receive power when the *“Holy Spirit has come upon you.”* In Acts 2, when the presence and power of the Holy Spirit was released at Pentecost, Luke reported that they were *“filled with the Holy Spirit.”* Extreme debate has occurred for over 100 years in denominational and interdenominational arenas about the difference between the baptism of the Spirit and the filling of the Spirit. However, Jesus and Luke used these expressions interchangeably, which would indicate a one and the same experience. To baptize is to immerse with and to fill is to infuse with. What occurred simultaneously for the first time in Acts with the first-century Christians occurs simultaneously in the hearts and lives of every believer since. The Apostle Paul made it crystal clear in Ephesians 1:13 – *“In Christ, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation – when you believed, you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.”*

Here’s what scares the living daylights out of me. The church of the 21st century, with all of our unfathomable wealth, unbelievable technology, unparalleled communication, unequalled transportation, and unsurpassed knowledge, and we are nowhere near fulfilling the Acts 1:8 challenge. Could the reason be that we have done everything in our own power but the one thing that Jesus commanded -- WAIT FOR, RELY UPON, DEPEND ON the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

You will receive dunamis when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses. **Martus** = one who gives testimony or bears witness. Our word *martyr* derives from *martus*, so that we identify a martyr as one who bears testimony even to death. The only place in Acts it could have such a meaning is

the testimony unto death of Stephen in Acts 7. Here is Acts 1:8, Jesus affirmed that all believers, indwelt and infused by the Holy Spirit, must be, will be *My witnesses*. Witnessing is giving our testimony and living our testimony of our new life in Christ and the difference Jesus makes.

A follower of Jesus, a disciple of Christ, will bear witness and testify in three arenas.

- **We bear witness and testify to the Resurrection of Jesus.** Luke confirmed in verse 3 that Jesus *presented Himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during 40 days...* Jesus appeared numerous times in his resurrected body to prove that He was alive. Christianity is different from all other world religions, because the founder of our faith is not dead, but alive. Muhammed, founder of Islam, dead, tomb occupied. Guatama, the historical Buddha, founder of Buddhism, dead, tomb occupied. Confucius, founder of Confucianism, dead, tomb occupied. Joseph Smith, founder of Mormonism, dead, tomb occupied. Jesus Christ, founder of Christianity, alive, tomb empty. We testify and bear witness to the risen, resurrected Jesus.

- **We bear witness and testify to the Kingdom of God.** During this 40 day period, Jesus presented Himself alive by many convincing proofs, *“appearing to them and speaking about the kingdom of God.”* The kingdom of God had been the main topic of Jesus’ teaching. Jesus asserted that the kingdom of God is to be primary, not secondary. *“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you.”* (Matthew 6:33) Jesus instructed us about prayer: *“You should pray like this: Our Father in heaven, your name be honored as holy. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”* (Matthew 6:9) Even though they heard Jesus speak the words in Luke 17:21 – *“The kingdom of God is not coming with something observable.... the kingdom of God is in your midst.”* – within you, they still asked the question, *“Lord, are you restoring the kingdom to Israel at this time?”* Their strategic expectation involved a geographic, territorial takeover. But Jesus’ strategic plan involved a spiritual takeover, where Jesus is Lord and Christianity invades the religious and political strongholds. Here we are, 2000 years later, and our challenge today is the same as it was then – our greatest need in Lafayette, in Louisiana, in North America, and to the ends of the earth is a spiritual takeover – a spiritual “take back.” As a Christian, a kingdom citizen, I’m sick and tired of government and community leaders shoving down our throats alternate lifestyles and decadent behavior and at the same time telling Christians to be quiet. I’m sick and tired of school systems and legislative schemes diminishing and dismantling Christian values. It’s time for us to take back control of our families, our communities, our schools and our

governments and reestablish the kingdom of God! Let's make this our theme song -- *"I'll tell the world that I'm a Christian – I'm not ashamed His name to bear!"*

- **We bear witness and testify to the Nations.** Acts 1:8 represents the fifth version of Jesus' Great Commission: *"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."* *Eschatou* = the remotest part, the last extreme. This geographical template defines the contents of Acts – these first century Christians shared the good news of Jesus' salvation in Jerusalem first, then extended it into Judea and Samaria, the Jewish homeland and interracial neighborhood, and beyond to the limits of the earth. Jesus declared in Matthew 24:14 – *"This good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed in all the world as a testimony to all nations. And then the end will come."* We may well be living in the end times and the last days, but if so, then we must hurry, because numerous people groups around the world have not yet been evangelized. I believe Jesus is not coming back until all the nations have been evangelized, and evangelism of all the nations starts here – Lafayette, LA – our Jerusalem. We bear witness and testify to the nations. We bear witness and testify to the resurrection of Jesus. We bear witness and testify to the kingdom of God.

2. We are Left Behind to WAIT. Verses 9-11 graphically describe Jesus departure from Earth. He was *"taken up as they were watching, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. While He was going (ascending upward, a clue that heaven is UP! We refer to this theologically as the Ascension, "the going up" departure of Jesus), two angelic messengers, as their white garb indicated, appeared with a question: "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up into heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come in the same way that you have seen Him going into heaven."* Going and coming accommodate the same Greek word = *Parousia*. Jesus left them behind, but not for the last time. Just hours before His death on the Cross, as recorded by the Apostle John, Jesus encouraged His Disciples that He would be going away to prepare the heavenly place for them, but that He would come back and gather them together with Him. This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way that you have seen Him going up. **Jesus' descent will occur in the same way as His ascent.** So, do you believe in the literal return of Jesus? If His return (descent) is not literal, then His was not literal. If his ascent was not literal, then his resurrection was not literal. And if His resurrection is not literal, then it's all over for us as Christians. We may as well throw away our Bibles, close the doors of our churches, and go home, because it's all over.

It's not over – we are left behind to wait for Jesus' Second Coming. We are the people who are waiting and living, expectantly and triumphantly and victoriously for the day as 1 Thessalonians 4 marks with the shout of God's archangel and the sound of God's trumpet. Paul commended the Thessalonian Christians for their reputation as those *“who wait for the Son from heaven.”* (1 Thessalonians 1:10). Titus 2:14 challenges us *“to deny godlessness and worldly lusts and to live in a sensible, righteous, and godly way in the present age, while we wait for the blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.”*

So what will it be, church. **Urgency or Complacency.** Will First Lafayette be the church of urgency or the church of complacency? Urgency defines that which requires immediate attention. Complacency describes smug satisfaction with an existing situation. Our greatest need in the American church is a Sense of Urgency. We are left behind to bear witness and testify. If First Lafayette fails to reach the lost and unchurched of this city and these neighborhoods – then what church will? If we the Christians of Lafayette will not live with the expectancy and expediency of the Second Coming of Jesus, then which Christian's will? Let's be the generation that fulfills what we were left behind to be and to do.