

# OUTBREAK – the uncontrollable spread of the Kingdom

## Week 2 # Promise

Acts 1: 12-14

12 Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk[c] from the city. 13 When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. 14 They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

As I mentioned in the first week, with our study of Acts we need to have three simultaneous operations going on. We're looking at the history of the early church – so we need to understand it in the historical and social context of the time. Jewish people with a Jewish understanding of life and God and everything. In a Roman occupied world. In 1<sup>st</sup> Century Jerusalem. Then later in the book incorporating non-Jews and expanding into other areas of the Middle East. All well and good but there's more.

One foot needs to be planted in the teachings of Jesus – everything they did is given context and makes sense only if we read it in the light of what Jesus taught and then commanded the disciples to go and do.

The other foot is planted in our world now. What does all this mean for us today? What is transferable? What is translatable?

- We want to take the text as a dynamic exposition of what happens when the teachings and training of Jesus is put into action in 1<sup>st</sup> Century Israel,
- and translate this into our present day situation, with the question 'How then does it work for us?'

This first two weeks are based around two concepts – participate and promise.

### Participate

This book is called the Acts of the apostles. Not the beliefs of the apostles, not the intentions of the apostles, not the hope and ambition of the apostles, not the teaching of the apostles, but the acts of the apostles. The doings. What they actually got up to.

When your book is written it will not be called the beliefs of Bob. Not the maturity of Bob. Not the length of time Bob spent in church, not the prayers meetings attending by Bob. It will be called the acts of Bob. What, when it boiled down to it, did you actually step out and do...

**Talk about pedals – participate tends to lean towards get out and do (works) and today is the other pedal (faith) but one without the other is a bike that goes nowhere.**

### Promise

On what basis do we launch into doing the stuff? Well we've been commanded to do it. We've been given the authority to do it, and we have a promise from Jesus relating to it.

Matthew 28:18-20

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

The favour of God was on the disciples, and they were given a promise. The favour of God is on you. We know this from John 20:29 Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

And also Jesus said this; **Matt 11:11 Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.**

You have a promise over your life. Some of you know God's specific promises over your life and have written them down somewhere, others maybe seeking God for some promises for their lives. Either way, we have the general promises of the Kingdom (see attachment).

God's call and his initial anointing often came with a promise.

Abraham was called by God to leave everything and go where he was sent, but was given this promise  
"I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you;  
I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.  
I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse;  
and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

And Mary – 'Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you.'

**And what incredible favour, what an incredible promise? But what did it mean for the poor, unmarried teenager? It probably meant criticism, gossip and disapproval from her community – her own family in all probability.**

**Before you go headlong into requesting the favour of the Lord, if you desire the favour of God on your life you need to consider what it might look like. It might not always be cash and promotion and comfort and success.**

So do you want the favour of God on you? Do you want to step into the divine destiny God has for your life? Do you want God to speak promises into your future?

This is the beginning of a God-adventure that will see blessing and favour poured out upon you and then flow into the lives of others around you, but it won't necessarily be what you expect, it might not look like you expect it to, and it won't necessarily come without a struggle.

Take my story – when we headed down to Plymouth we carried a sense of promise, a divine destiny, and you know what? There have been struggles, battles, tests – things thrown our way intended to take us off course. We've stayed in the fight and in the meantime seen incredible blessing and favour shown us, some wonderful things happen. Lives touched and changed, things planted. But the most exciting thing is this – particularly for you people sitting there – the most exciting thing is that the promise we came down to participate with – it hasn't arrived yet. We carry a vision and a dream that hasn't yet been released. **Temptation to trade in the vision for something smaller.** The best is yet to come!

I was reading Heidi Baker's book Birthing the Miraculous and she had a similar promise but a whole lot bigger, and her sacrifice was much bigger too. She left everything and, with her husband, moved to Mozambique. She felt prompted by the HS to ask God to give her a nation. We've just asked for a City. She asked for a nation.

And did it happen?

Well for 20 years they laboured and saw some blessing but nothing near what she had dreamed. She went to a Catch the Fire conference in Toronto having just had everything confiscated in Mozambique, and the speaker prayed for her and said 'God wants to know, do you want the nation of Mozambique?' much prayer later she returned to Mozambique full of faith and expectancy, only for things to get worse. Her husband and daughter repeatedly caught malaria, finances got worse, no-one she prayed for got healed. Then after a year of this something changed. The blind began to see, the crippled got healed, three of her Mozambiquan pastors raised people from the dead. Up to that point they had planted four churches – since that time more than 10,000 churches have been planted in and around Mozambique.

**What is the promise over your life? What favour has God divinely given you? Maybe you can't answer this. Maybe this morning you need to kneel before God and offer him your life, give him your yes, and step into the adventure that awaits.**

Either way he has called you – like it or not – to participate in the irresistible spread of the Kingdom. As we read through Acts and see how it started we want to be embracing the story in our own city – **Come Home, Know God, Love Others.** It doesn't take much, we need no special talents or training, because it is the HS who does the business.

How did the apostles make a start? Well we see here that they didn't really know what to do, except they weren't going to say no. They hung in there and prayed in the upper room. I love this picture of gritty perseverance combined with complete inadequacy. They were afraid, lost, confused but faithful.

Do you ever feel that way about life? But they had a promise and an instruction, and so they went with those orders and trusted.

You might feel a bit inadequate, lost and confused, but the good news is the flip side of the bad – you don't have what it takes. We can trust in God and stand on the promise given when we were called.

To finish let's review the 3 somethings that we bear in mind when opening God's word.

- **Something to know** – know that with each call of God comes a promise just as with Abraham, Mary, the disciples and now us. You've been called to go and make disciples, and what's the promise? All authority has been given to Jesus and he is with you.
- **Something to believe** – God's favour rest upon you, and that favour is powerful. Much more powerful than the powers and principalities of this world. And it's life changing.
- **Something to do** – What do you think the do is? Do you think it's to get out there and evangelise, heal and cast out demons? To work harder and do more? Well I forgive you for getting that impression sometimes, but actually it isn't the case. You have to decide in your heart whether you want to receive the favour offered by Jesus, and then if you're willing, just as Mary was, just as Abraham was, just as the apostles were, then receive it.

Make a point of actively giving your yes to God. We can start now. We will play some music and invite the HS to be here with us, and then I'm going to ask all those who want to receive the favour of God to stand and hold out your hands.