

A Community of Unstoppable Mission

Acts 1:1-11

Introduction

Listen ... See if you can "Name This Tune." (*Advance slide*)

Right. The theme from Mission Impossible. Depending on your age, that tune evokes an image of one of two men: Peter Graves, who starred in the long running TV series in the mid-1960s or Tom Cruise who has turned that series into (so far) six highly successful movies.

If you know the either series, you know that the name is a bit misleading. It is only when a mission becomes IMPOSSIBLE for ordinary people that it is given to Peter Graves and Tom Cruise. With them on the case, the mission is no longer IMPOSSIBLE.

I grew up with that theme song. It inspired many daredevil actions for my brother and me, not all of which were successful. We might be standing on the bank of a creek when one of us would ask the other "Think you jump it without getting wet?" And before the answer would be given, we would start humming that theme.

Our journey into the initial chapters of Acts these past six weeks has been titled UNSTOPPABLE. We have seen how the band of Christians left behind when Jesus returned to heaven – a band He named "the church" – has taken on the very gates of hell, which is what Jesus told them would and should happen:

... on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hell will not stand against it. (Matthew 16:18)

We have seen in this series how the church comes together as the Body of Christ, and that within that community, this church is capable of Unstoppable ... Grace ... Faith ... Courage ... Witness ... Commitment. Today we see a church called to be UNSTOPPABLE in its mission.

Let me share two truths about this mission from this text today:

TRUTH #1: THE MISSION WAS BEGUN BY JESUS

Look at how the passage begins:

In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven ... (Acts 1:1-2a)

Dr. Luke is the author of the book of Acts. The "former book" to which he refers is the Gospel of Luke. The Gospel is part 1; Acts is part 2.

- Gospel (part 1): The story of Jesus (mission begun)
- Acts (part 2): The story of the church (mission continued)

It's the same mission. When Jesus began that mission back in His hometown of Nazareth, His first public sermon adopted the words of the prophet Isaiah as His own mission statement.

The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. (Luke 4:18-19)

And when He sent His followers out on a practice run during His three year ministry, He gave these instructions:

As you go, proclaim this message: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give. (Matthew 10:7-8)

It is a classic teaching strategy.

- Jesus comes and models it.
- Jesus releases others to do what He was doing.
- Together they debrief what they experienced.
- Jesus turns the task over to them.

The last of those four steps is what happens in this passage. Jesus goes back into Heaven. His portion of the mission is done. And in so doing, He turns the mission over to the church.

Throughout the book of Acts, we see the early church simply doing the same things Jesus did, over and over. The mission of the early church was so UNSTOPPABLE because it wasn't their idea! It was never their mission ... and it still isn't! It is now and always has been the mission of Jesus.

That is one of the reasons it is so important for the church today to stay true what Jesus taught. You see, if we are proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus, we are in mission with Him. But when a church deviates from that, bringing in its own version of the gospel, it separates itself from the mission of Jesus. And in so doing, it no longer is UNSTOPPABLE.

I'm reminded of this teaching in the Sermon on the Mount:

You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. (Matthew 5:13)

My opinions and the opinions of popular culture stand no chance against the powers of hell. Hell walks all over them. But the mission of Jesus Christ is UNSTOPPABLE.

TRUTH #2: THE MISSION IS POWERED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

Verse 8:

You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. (Acts 1:8)

Note the sequence. Power first. Go second. Both parts are essential, but they happen in a particular sequence. You see that in other parts of this text. In verse 4, Jesus commands:

Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. (Acts 1:4)

Go back and wait. And they did. Ten days later the power came. Pentecost Sunday! That is next week's text, so I am not going to steal my thunder. You will have to come back next week to hear what happened when the Holy Spirit came. But let me give you this teaser: When the Holy Spirit came, they started to witness, and the results were amazing!

But the sequence was right. Power first. Go second. Some of you will remember an adult Sunday School class Pastor Beverly and I taught a few years ago. The class was based on a book by Michael Green titled "Thirty Years that Changed the World." In it Green makes this comment:

How much we need the Holy Spirit in our church life! Had it struck you that if the New Testament is right in the marrying up of the Holy Spirit with witness bearing, this might shed a flood light on the poverty of spiritual experience in many a church and many a Christian? Could it be that we know so little of the Spirit in any powerful way because we care so little for evangelism?

These two God has joined together, and we cannot put them asunder. No evangelism, no Holy Spirit; no Holy Spirit, no evangelism. There is a vital link between them, and that explains a good deal of the powerlessness in the modern church. The early Christians were well aware that the Holy Spirit and evangelism went together and affected each other intimately."

If Michael Green is correct, and I think he is, you can talk about the Holy Spirit as much as you want, but if you are not engaged in the UNSTOPPABLE MISSION of Jesus, you know nothing of the power of the Holy Spirit. The two cannot be separated.

The purpose of the gift is so the mission will be fulfilled.

In 1886, Dr. John Pemberton first introduced Coca-Cola in Atlanta, Georgia. He developed it in a three-legged brass kettle in his backyard. He first "distributed" Coca-Cola by carrying it in a jug down the street to Jacobs Pharmacy.

A little more than 100 years later, a survey showed that 97% of the world had heard of Coca-Cola, 72% of the world had seen a can of Coca-Cola and 51% of the world has tasted it. That's all due to the fact that the company made a commitment many years ago that everyone on the planet would have a taste of their soft drink.

Don't miss this: 97% of the world has heard of this soft drink while 1.7 billion people world-wide still have no access to the good news of Jesus Christ! It is estimated that 17 million people die every year without having heard the name of Jesus!

The Holy Spirit was not given so that ...

- You might have a warm fuzzy feeling
- You might have something to talk about in Bible study
- But so that we the church would be UNSTOPPABLE as we carried on the mission begun by Jesus

APPLICATION

The final action in the drama of this passage is what we call the "Ascension" of Jesus. It is that action we celebrate in our worship today. The author describes it like this:

After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. (Acts 1:9)

The mission that Jesus began now belonged to them. If this were a relay race, this is the handing off of the baton. Jesus had run his portion of the race. Now they were to start running.

They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going ... (Acts 1:10)

What they did was natural. You and I would have done the same thing. In our Tuesday Bible study, Dan Shroyer compared it to watching the space shuttle mission launch from Cape Canaveral. People keep watching until the last speck is out of sight ... and then they watch a little bit more. Apparently these disciples stood watching a bit longer than they should have, for two angels (men dressed in white) appeared and asked:

Why do you stand here looking into the sky? (Acts 1:11)

They were supposed to be in Jerusalem, waiting for the arrival of the Holy Spirit.

What question do you think these "men in white" would ask you? We don't need to wait, because the Holy Spirit has already come. So what might they say?

Amen.