

Sermon: "Getting Ready for New Power"

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Text: Luke 24:45-53.

Sermon Outline.

Introduction ~ Have you considered the power of what you are expecting to happen, your level of expectation? Are you really expecting God to supply new power to His people? Are you and I actually expecting the best from God?

Some time ago, the School Superintendent of San Francisco conducted a fascinating experiment. He brought in three teachers. He told these three teachers that they were the top teachers in the entire San Francisco school system. He said, "We're going to do an experiment this year. We're going to take the ninety top students in our system, and we're going to give them to you, the best teachers. We're going to see just how much you can teach these bright students in one year."

When the year was over, the standardized tests revealed that these students had progressed on average thirty percent (30%) farther than the rest of the students in their grade level.

At the end of that school year, the Superintendent called the teachers in and said, "I have a confession to make. Remember when I told you that your students were the best in their grade level? They were not. They were chosen at random." The teachers began to smile, anticipating the validation of their skills as educators; but the Superintendent continued, "I have another confession to make. Remember when I told you that you were the best teachers in the school system? In fact, your names were drawn randomly, out of a hat. Everything that happened was simply the result of your expecting the best from your students..."

The power of what you and I expect... people tend to live up, or down, to their level of expectation. What you and I expect can greatly affect every aspect of our lives, including that First Priority, your relationship with the living God.

Our text today describes an expectant people of God. Luke is the only Gospel writer to describe the actual ascension of the risen Jesus into heaven. The event of our text sets the stage for everything that follows in the Book of Acts. [Remember: the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts are two halves of a unified whole. Luke and Acts are meant to be read together as one continuing story.]

Consider the position of that enlarged group of disciples. They have just experienced the powerful intervention of God. God has just raised Jesus Messiah from the dead, and Jesus has just explained to them the "what" and the "why" of that event to them. Now, here in our text, Jesus describes the "what next" in God's program. It's in two parts: first, "You are My witnesses to all the nations;" and second, "The Holy Spirit will empower you for this task."

Both of these pieces are exciting, even fantastic – the program and the power. The disciples were to take up the task God originally planned for the nation of Israel; the disciples were going to take God's light to all the nations of the world. That task represented the fulfillment of the shattered national purpose of Israel. Hey, would you be excited to take up the shattered national purpose of, say, the United States of America? Would you say that's a God-sized vision? That's the vision these people are about to embark upon.

The power of the Holy Spirit – people longed for the return of the Holy Spirit because they recognized they had driven Him away by their continued disobedience. The prophets had pointed to hope: one day, God would send His Holy Spirit back to His people. Then, during His earthly ministry, Jesus set people free by the power of the Holy Spirit. Now, Jesus alive from the dead, tells these people, "I'm going to give that same power to all of you." Could you get excited about the fulfillment of a God-sized dream?

Here in our text, I hope you caught the celebrative atmosphere. These people are celebrating because of what God is about to do for them and through them. That's why they returned to the city with great joy. That's why they were continuously praising God. What God had just done made them excited about what God was about to do. God was about to do something marvelous for them and through them by the power of the Holy Spirit.

People, I have just given you Luke's definition of the Christian life. What God has already done for us in Jesus makes us excited about what God is about to do through us by the power of the Holy Spirit. The believer in Jesus anticipates with excitement and joy what God is about to do. Here, in our text, those disciples are preparing themselves to receive new power. They are an expectant people.

▣ Yes, you can get ready for new power from God.

✧ In our text, we discover four keys to getting ready to receive new power from God.

I. The first key is to reflect on what God has already been doing. With the direct help of Jesus, this is what the disciples have just been doing.

A. Throughout the last several years, I've been sharing with you the facts of what God is doing around the world: the spiritual awakening in South Africa, the explosive growth of the churches in China... I've been doing this for two reasons:

1. First, you will not see or hear or read about the activity of God in any of the mainstream media. Nobody reports on what God is doing. This deliberate blindness has been going on at least since 1989. United Press International voted the spiritual awakening in Eastern Europe and Russia the most-underreported story in 1989. That spiritual awakening caused the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union; and U.P.I. recognized and admitted they had missed the real story on why communism collapsed. Anti-Christian media bias has not gotten better since then, has it?

If I, as your pastor, don't tell you what God is doing around the world, it's highly probable that you will not see it anywhere where else in the mainstream media.

2. Second, I've been sharing God's good news with you – what God has been doing around the world – because it will encourage you to expect God to do "His thing" here in our nation, here in Pittsburgh, and here in our church.

The first key in preparing yourself for new power is to discover and reflect upon what God has just done around the world.

II. The second key factor is to worship Jesus and center your life on Jesus.

A. Remember, in verse fifty-two, there are Jewish folk who are now worshipping Jesus. That means that the disciples now recognize that Jesus is God, completely worthy of worship.

Even to this day, there are a few New Testament scholars who try to tell you that this idea of Jesus being God really developed very late

in the history of the Early Church. That's complete and total nonsense. Thomas drew the right conclusion the Sunday after that first Easter, when Thomas stuck his finger in the wounds of the risen Jesus. Thomas exclaims, "My Lord and my God!"

Luke tells us the same thing that John does: the recognition of deity actually took place before the event of Pentecost. The recognition that Jesus is 'my Lord and my God' is basic to preparing yourself for new power. I'm talking about making your relationship with Jesus the integrating point of your life...

III. The third key in getting ready to receive new power is this: 'Don't take yourself out of the play.'

A. In verse forty-nine, Jesus gives a command specific to their group and their circumstances: "Stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." The meaning of this command is pretty straightforward: "God is going to clothe you with power here in Jerusalem; stay here until that happens."

B. The question is: "Why?" Why would Jesus give such a command? Two basic reasons:

1. The disciples were still fuzzy on what it was God wanted to do. Jesus gave them the next step they were to take and plainly labeled it for them. "Do this next; don't skip this and go on ahead to the rest of it." The disciples often had trouble doing the one simple "next step" Jesus told them to do. So do you and I.
2. The second reason is something I want to highlight and underscore. Jesus wanted them included in what God was about to do. If the disciples had left Jerusalem, they would have been outside the city when the Holy Spirit began His world-wide eruption of grace. God wanted to begin with them; they needed to be in the right place at the right time. If they had left Jerusalem, they could have taken themselves "out of the play," out of God's plan to reach people.

Do you know what I mean by "taking yourself out of the play?" Let me give you some examples. Some of us know about the "hit-and-run play" in baseball. There is also a play called "the run and hit play." The base runner on first base runs with the pitch, hoping to draw the

second baseman into covering him at second base. If the second baseman moves out of field position, he leaves a hole for the batter to hit the ball through. The second baseman is lured out of position. The batter hits the ball where the second baseman has just vacated.

In football, there's an offensive play called, "the tackle trap." One of the offensive guards, pulls hoping the defensive tackle will follow that guard. If the defensive tackle follows the guard, there will be a beautiful hole for the running back to run through. You trick the defensive tackle into taking himself away from the play.

Or how about this one, ladies? You're late for a wedding in Monroeville. You and your husband get on the Parkway. The traffic is terrible so you try to pass that line of slow moving cars only to discover that you are now several lanes away you're your exit. You miss your exit. When you double back, you hit construction. You arrive in time for the reception, and the family of the bride are not amused.

Taking yourself out of the play, taking yourself out of position – you and I are constantly doing this as believers in Jesus Christ. We do this by ignoring our opportunities to study God's Word, to really learn how to pray. Some believers have done this simply by quitting too soon. For example, Jesus reconciled with each of the disciples who ran out on Him when He was arrested. Jesus could have restored even Judas Iscariot, but Judas "took himself out of the play." Taking yourself out of position – this can be done by refusing to discover and use your spiritual gift to help other people grow. When you and I refuse to do anything we already know God wants us to do, we have in effect taken ourselves "out of the play."

When you and I take ourselves out of the play, we are the ones who lose out. God's program still goes on and moves ahead. God works through available people. When we make ourselves unavailable, we force God to work through other people to pursue His purposes. We could end up by-passed by God when He pours out His new power on a group of people.

So far this morning, we've examined what we can do to prepare ourselves to receive new power from God. We've discovered three keys, three important items:

Text: Luke 24:45-53.

Sermon Outline.

1. Reflect on all that God has been doing to fulfill His purposes;
2. Worship Jesus. Make sure Jesus is the center of your life.
3. One "Don't." Don't take yourself out of the play, out of position.

IV. The fourth key is to ask God to do what you already know He wants to do. In prayer, align yourself completely with the immediate known purpose of God.

In our text, "They stayed continually at the Temple, praising God."

The emphasis is on praying continually, daily praying, praying each day fervently and intelligently; the accent is not necessarily on, shall we say? daily church attendance.

You see, when Jesus' disciples went into the Temple to pray in those days just before Pentecost, they knew exactly what to pray for. Jesus had already told them, "I'm going to pour out the Holy Spirit on all of you; God will clothe you with power." Those disciples prayed expectantly, asking God to exactly what they knew God intended to do.

Yes, there is biblical for the connection between praying and being empowered by the Holy Spirit. It should come as no surprise to you that Luke the Physician highlights this crucial connection. One of Luke's major themes in both the Gospel and the Book of Acts is the link between effective praying and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Have you ever taken a closer look at Luke's account of the Baptism of Jesus in Luke 3:21 and following. Turn with me to that passage, please [p. 1016].

When you compare the Gospel of Luke with the first chapter of Mark's Gospel, you quickly recognize that Luke closely follows Mark's account in all the key elements:

- The Voice from heaven is addressed directly to Jesus personally.
- The actual content of what the Father says to His Son is identical in both passages.

* But Luke has an added element: prayer and receiving the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. The connection between effective praying and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit goes right back to the experience of Jesus! So, yes, there is biblical warrant for God's people to pray for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Watch this! You and I have the example of Jesus to follow in all things. When Jesus prays and is then empowered with the Holy Spirit, you and I are strongly encouraged to follow this specific example.

In Luke Chapter Eleven Jesus encourages His disciples to pray. Jesus says this:

"Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" "For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened."

Friends, this is a basic/simple principle of effective praying. You and I are the ones who make it complicated. When we observe what God is doing around the world, you and I can rightly conclude that God wants to do "His thing" here. When you and I make Jesus the center of our lives, we can buy into the basic program of God.

There can be no doubt whatsoever the risen Jesus wants you and me to be His witnesses here in the South Hills. There can be no doubt the risen Jesus wants to empower each of us and this church for that witness.

When you are doing what you already know God wants you to do, it can then be easy to ask God to do what you already know God wants to do. You and I can pray, asking God to give new power to us as a church... because we already know this is what God wants to do. Conclusion ~ Are you and I really expecting the best from God? For our church? Are you and I really expecting God to do something new in our church and through our church? Are you willing to pray that way? To pray expectantly for God to empower our church?

People, I've prayed for that far too long to quit now. I will never quit praying for that. I pray for this daily. I know this is what God wants to do for our church. It's here in the Book. It's what God is doing all around the world today. We can ask God to do it here. Yes, you and I can ask God to pour out His power on our church. Friends, it's time to pray expectantly for God to empower our church!