

## ***Re-Start Week 1: Restarting the Right Way - Acts 1:1-11***

### **David Bawks - Pathway Community Church (March 7, 2021)**

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Good morning Pathway! How are we doing today? Welcome to March. At our house the latest news is that Makena has started soccer, so we are just beginning that parenting period of having after school activities and practices and rehearsals and all of that, but it is exciting to have her trying something new and to have something to put on our calendar, so all in all a good week.

Today we are starting a new sermon series called Re-Start. What would you like to restart in your life? If you could ask God to restart anything in your life, or your business, or your family, what would it be? God is in the business of making things new, and continues to give us new chances and new mercy each and every day.

Personally, I would love to see in person school restarting, and I'm very encouraged that that appears to be on the horizon, and is coming closer. I cannot wait until we restart our worship and groups and outreach and other discipleship avenues in person. I would love to restart travel, and have the chance to move around to more places like I used to do. I know there are a lot that we are all looking forward to resuming.

I'm really excited for this Re-Start series, and I'm looking forward to going through the book of Acts to see how God used the early church to revise and renew and refashion their structures of worship and outreach to make a huge impact in the world. I have two favorite books of the Bible – 2 Kings, and Acts, and what draws me to both of those books is the incredible power of God demonstrated through the miracles and ministry told in these books. Just amazing and incredible things that happen that I find so encouraging in my life of faith. Please turn with me to Acts chapter 1.

**1** In my former book, *Theophilus*, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach <sup>2</sup> until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. <sup>3</sup> After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. <sup>4</sup> On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. <sup>5</sup> For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

<sup>6</sup> Then they gathered around him and asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

<sup>7</sup> He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. <sup>8</sup> But 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."

<sup>9</sup> After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

<sup>10</sup>They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. <sup>11</sup>“Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

The most incredible and amazing event in our faith history is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In a month we're going to celebrate Easter and remember this moment that made salvation possible for all of us. But something strange about Easter is what happened afterward. After Jesus rose from the dead, came out of the tomb and saw the women and the disciples, then what happened? Did Jesus lead a new missions movement across the world, travelling to each continent to expand his ministry, heal the sick and proclaim the coming of the kingdom of God? Did Jesus set up a Jerusalem center to coordinate and organize the new Christian church? Or set up a school to train new Christian pastors and evangelists?

No, if you know the story and as we see in verse 9, Jesus didn't do any of that. Instead, he left. Gone. He defeated death, gave us new life and hope, and then disappeared. He ascended to sit at the right hand of the father, with the promise that He would return. But he left the disciples with a monumental task – of figuring out how to take their Jewish faith and heritage and use that as their foundation to completely redo their existing structures of worship and ministry to reach the rest of the world. The book of Acts is the story of how this process unfolded. Before we get there though, I'd like to look at something else first.

For any history fans watching this, what happened in the year 476? About 500 years after Jesus upset the entire course of history through the resurrection? Any guesses? That is the year that the city of Rome fell, and was one of the milestones that marked the end of the power of the Western Roman empire. This ushered in an age of disruption for both society and the church that has rarely if ever been matched in any other period of human history. In 590, Saint Gregory the Great became the Roman Pope, and through a period of extreme upheaval led the church to some measure of stability and into the monastic movement that would “protect, preserve and characterize it for the next five centuries” (Tickle, *The Great Emergence*, 22).

Moving to 1054, we come to another major date in our history – the division of the Eastern and the Western church. The Great Schism as it is called. This was a major breach in the church that came out of and led to great divergences in the celebration of communion, use of language in worship, use of icons, structure of church buildings, and other differences between the two. This came five hundred years after the fall of Rome.

Here's another date – 1517. This one is more familiar to many of us and is getting much closer to our time. Five hundred years after the Eastern Orthodox and the Roman Catholic church separated, we witness the 95 Theses of Martin Luther and the beginning of the Reformation. That led to the formation of the Protestant church and further changes in theology, understanding of the Bible, structures of leadership and authority, use of local languages in worship, and more. Our church heritage as a Baptist church leads directly to the Reformation.

Are you noticing a pattern here? Over the last two millennia we've witnessed a pattern of extreme change and disruption that happens about every 500 years. I've [been](#) reading a book that explores this pattern in greater detail called *The Great Emergence* by Phyllis Tinkle. She draws from the observation of this trend from the Anglican Bishop Mark Dyer, who said that "every five hundred years the Church feels compelled to hold a giant rummage sale" (Tinkle, *The Great Emergence*, 16). Another way to put that is this: "about every five hundred years the empowered structures of institutionalized Christianity, whatever they may be at the time, become an intolerable carapace [or shell] that must be shattered in order that renewal and new growth may occur" (Tinkle, *The Great Emergence*, 16). Thinking about this pattern, where do we fit into this? We are now 500 years from the Reformation, 1000 years from the Great Schism, 1500 years from the fall of Rome, and 2000 years from the resurrection and the birth of the early church. We are right in the middle of another season of extreme disruption, change and renewal that was happened before covid-19 ever started, and has only been accelerated by this pandemic.

Here is one of my core convictions that underlies our series for this month:

- **We are living in a unique time period in which we have an unparalleled opportunity to reach the world for Jesus.**

The question is, what will we do with this time? We can choose to shrink back out of uncertainty and fear of what this opportunity will involve or require of us, or we can choose to push forward and champion a new form of Christian life. We can choose to take up the mantle of apostolic leadership that is required in new seasons of history and study this new landscape and changing dynamics and improvise in order to reach the world for Jesus.

I have found it very encouraging to reflect on the seasons of disruption in the past and to remember that we are not the first people to experience this. We are of course not the first to go through a pandemic, and we're not the first who have faced a disruption of what we have known and always counted on. The extended decline of the Roman empire is considered by some the most disruptive and uncertain time in human history, and that was a challenging time for the church. People did not know what the future would hold, but new leaders stepped up and we made it through that time.

Periods of disruption in the past have always led to some aspects of features of Christian worship and practice being left behind, and new expressions of worship and ministry being taken up. It can take the form of cleansing, when something that had become corrupted and manipulated like the practice of indulgences in the medieval church is exposed as a faulty way to practicing our faith. We see in the past that certain churches that have become too entrenched in their ways and their systems struggle and lose influence, and that new churches and new styles of church rise up to take their place. In response to the Reformation, new Protestant churches sprang up all over the world, and in addition to that the form of Roman Catholic worship was also dramatically changed, so both the new and the previous forms of faith experience renewal and growth. We see similar trends with the growth of new monastic movements in the fifth and sixth century, and the division of the church in the eleventh century.

If we accept my contention that we are living in unique time period with an unparalleled opportunity to reach people for Jesus, then what should we do? How can we seize this opportunity? As we learn from the early church in Acts, we'll be answering this question over the next several weeks. From our passage today, here are two things I'll focus on:

### **1) Let's restart the right way.**

After Jesus experienced his death and suffering, we are told that he appeared to the apostles and presented many convincing proofs that he was alive. We know from the gospel of John that Jesus showed himself to Thomas and gave him a chance to feel the holes of the nails in his hands and the wound in his side. Jesus spent 40 days with them teaching them about the kingdom of God. He also told them to wait in Jerusalem for the gift of the Holy Spirit.

In verse 6, they ask an interesting question: "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" Right before this, Jesus had been teaching them about the kingdom of God, but they remained focused on their political power and influence. So often throughout the gospels they miss the main point and purpose of Jesus's teaching, and that seems to be the case here. I agree with John Stott when he says that "the verb, the noun and the adverb of their sentence all betray doctrinal confusion about the kingdom. The verb restore shows that they were expecting a political and territorial kingdom; the noun Israel that they were expecting a national kingdom; and the adverbial clause at this time that they were expecting its immediate establishment." (Stott, Acts, 41)

Jesus does not directly answer the question, but instead says: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. 8 But 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."

We know at least some of the disciples were very keen to take the top positions of leadership in the new administration. Their perspective was like those in a political campaign, because we know that the top leaders in a winning campaign are the ones most likely to get good jobs in a new administration. They desired this political power and influence.

The focus of the disciples was on their own country and their own people. But God's focus went far beyond Israel to include the ends of the earth. As we think about restarting our ministries this year, and continuing to figure out how to minister most effectively in our changing context, let's be sure to keep the right focus. Let's think broadly about the mission that God has called us to, and not become too limited by the constraints and the obstacles that we face. God is all about possibility.

We've been thinking about resuming in-person worship for a while. But If we think for a minute about our worship service on Sunday, what is the difference between restarting our services in person and returning to in person worship? Returning versus restarting? What do you think? As I've reflected on this, I'm realized that returning means making things the way they were before. Returning means going back to what we are used to, and recreating our past worship experience. But restarting is something else. Restarting means moving forward in a new way, and figuring out how we can worship together in person, but realizing that it will not look the same, and seeing that as opportunity to make

the changes we need to make and position ourselves to reach people for Jesus in this new season that we find ourselves in. These concepts are similar, but they do make a difference.

As we are continuing to move through the pandemic, many leaders are realizing that the disruptions we're going through are an opportunity to change the systems we're used to in order to address climate change, to reduce emissions and our carbon footprint, to improve our infrastructure, and to deal with the larger long-term problems we face. Our patterns of travel, commuting, leisure and much more have dramatically shifted and this presents enormous possibilities. But the key is to do this in the right way.

As a church we are working toward restarting our indoor services by Easter if at all possible, but we do have quite a bit of work to finish to meet this target. Please pray with me that we can make progress, and we need people to help staff our reopening teams. If you are able to help with greeting people at the door, with getting our chairs ready, with cleaning and sanitizing, with other set up then please let me or Pam know and we'll hold some planning meetings over the next couple weeks to update you on our progress and figure out the next steps.

I know some of us have gotten used to our church online, we're very comfortable with our current set up, and in some ways we might even like it better. I mean, it is easier to just watch this at home isn't it? But things will change over the next few weeks, and we're inviting you to be a part of that process, however you are able to do so.

## **2) Restarting can only be done in the power of the Holy Spirit.**

Jesus warned the disciples against heading out before they had received the Holy Spirit. They were to wait for the gift promised by the Father. For all of us, we will not be effective if we are not operating with the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is our energy source, our guiding light, our fount of wisdom, and our most immediate experience of God.

The disciples originally wanted political positions and power, but instead they were given something much greater – spiritual power and influence. They were given the very power of God, and were able to channel this power for healing, for prophecy, for caring for those in need, and doing the good works they were made for.

Many have called this book the Acts of the Holy Spirit, instead of the Acts of the Apostles, and this is an apt description of the book. All that the apostles were able to do was through the Holy Spirit. As we continue in the book, we will see this over and over again. Remember that restarting can only be done in the power of the Holy Spirit. We cannot move forward in our ministry at Pathway without the Holy Spirit's help; we have to depend on His power to restart otherwise our efforts will not bear any fruit.

Next week we will continue to Acts chapter 2, and we'll see over and over again in this book the centrality of the Holy Spirit in the work of the early church. The Holy Spirit remains essential and central in our life and our ministry today.

I'm going to close with communion. Please grab some bread and some juice, whatever you have available to you. Communion is the celebration of the restart that all of us are offered through Jesus Christ. In 2 Corinthians 5:17 it says Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! (NIV)

God has already done the work of redemption, and when we claim this free gift that is when God starts working on our own resurrection, and our new life in Christ. It available to all of us, and that's what we are commemorating today. I'll invite anyone watching this who has taken the step of following Jesus to join us in this sacrament together.

I'm going to read from 1 Cor 11.

23 For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me."

Let's eat the bread together.

25 In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." 26 For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

To review what we have looked at today, I believe that:

- **We are living in a unique time period in which we have an unparalleled opportunity to reach the world for Jesus.**
- 1) **Let's restart the right way.**
  - 2) **Restarting can only be done in the power of the Holy Spirit.**