

Sunday Evening 13th January 2013- Kenneth Gray, Acts 1:1-11 "The end of the beginning."



The Book of Acts provides a bridge for the writings of the New Testament. As a second volume to Luke's gospel it joins what Jesus 'began to do and teach' as told in the gospels with what he continued to do and teach through the apostles' preaching and the establishment of the church.

In this passage the gospel has already reached 'the ends of the earth' as known at that time. Kenneth observed that if there were a follow-up volume to Acts,

covering what is being done and taught in the church today, then we would be part of it – part of the ongoing mission of Jesus Christ working through us. The message remains the same and the work continues from generation to generation. Jesus did life-changing things in those days and he can still transform people's lives today.

It is important that we read about the activities of the early church as a reminder of what the church should be like. The early church displayed certain characteristics:

1. **Dependent on God.** The early church had no constitution, no bank account, no money, no buildings. This was how Freeland Church began – its people wholly dependent on God's word and the power of the Holy Spirit. In our days there are so many elaborate church buildings such as St Peter's in Rome or St Paul's in London. Many churches are wealthy institutions but the power of the Holy Spirit is hard to discern. The early church gave everything to the service of Jesus Christ.

2. **Obedient.** This was not easy for those early disciples. They had been told by Jesus to stay in Jerusalem and await the Spirit's empowering. But they were restless and itching to get to work and spread the Good News so they went to Galilee. In our day too people have a restless spirit. It seems we cannot sit at peace without using our mobile phones or other technological devices. We must always be busy. We need to learn how to wait on God and let him lead us so that we can become busy to a worthy purpose. We must be obedient to the purpose of God. Jesus' instruction to remain in Jerusalem was repeated because it was so important that the Holy Spirit would come to transform them and equip them for the work ahead.

3. **Obedient without knowing.** In response to the disciples' typically human desire to know the details of the times and dates of his plan Jesus tells them not to concern themselves with such things. Jesus keeps them in the dark about these details because true faithfulness to him must be shown in a willingness to act 'in faith'. To be effective followers the disciples would have to set aside the frustrations of 'not knowing', think differently from how they used to think and depend totally on God. The modern church has forgotten how to wait on God, how to listen to the Holy Spirit – as the old hymn puts it how to 'trust and obey'.

4. **Looking upward intently.** As soon as the Ascension was over it was past. God was now calling them to new work. There was no point now in continuing to gaze heavenward. For us a similar temptation lies in continually looking back wistfully on the so-called halcyon days of the church and harking back to former blessings. Continually reliving old glories distracts us from moving forward in our spiritual journey. It is a human tendency to want the world to be as it used to be and in the church it means we tend to try to reach people in the same old ways we used to do. The world has moved on. The church needs to listen to the Spirit's prompting and learn how we should win souls for Christ in our generation. We are here with the same purpose and the same message as the early church and we have access to the same power if we choose to seek and accept it.

As we begin a new year of work and witness are we in Galilee gazing upwards at the sky or are we in Jerusalem, listening to the Holy Spirit?