

# THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

by

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## CHAPTER THREE

### 3. PREPARATION OF WITNESSES

(Acts 1:8, 14; 2:1)

#### OUTLINE

**Key verse 8.**

**Here we have an example of witnesses trained under Christ who knew that they must:**

- I. Renounce the world.**
- II. Have a personal relationship with Christ.**
- III. Undergo a period of preparation.**
- IV. Render obedience to Christ's commands.**
- V. Have faith in Christ's promises.**
- VI. Have a united aim.**
- VII. Engage in whole-hearted prayer.**
- VIII. Live a life of self-denying service.**
- IX. Work in dependence upon the Holy Spirit.**

#### RENOUNCE THE WORLD

They gave up the work of fishing, tax gathering, or other work in which they may have been engaged that they might follow Jesus. Jesus had told them that if any man would come after Him he should deny himself and take up his cross and follow Him. Now that Jesus had died upon the Cross His words had a new meaning to all of His disciples. He had told them that no man can serve two masters. He will hate the one and love the other or hold to the one and despise the other. They could not serve God and mammon. He had also warned them that if any man puts his hand to the plow and looks back he is not fit for the kingdom of God.

This was an old tendency of human nature stated anew and urged in a new and more forceful manner by Jesus.

It was true in the days of Abraham and Lot; it was true in the days of Rehoboam; it was true in the days of Nehemiah and it was true in the days of Malachi. Jesus said it was easier for a camel

to go through a needle's eye than for a man whose heart was set upon the riches of the world to enter into the kingdom of God. Judas loved silver and the attractions which came through it more than he loved Jesus. At the present time the desire to hold to the world and to Jesus seems to be growing with a commercial age. This is manifest in the increasing proportion of young men who enter gainful professions rather than the ministry of the Gospel.

There is a crying need on the part of the disciples of Christ in this, as in every age, to renounce the world. What is it that will bring about the transformation needed? There is need of a new realization of the sacrifice that Jesus has made; of what he has done and is doing for us; of the fact that we owe everything that we have in this world to Him, and that all the rest, happiness, comfort, beauty, and glory which we expect to enjoy in the next are His gifts to us. This world and its pleasures are fleeting and will soon pass away; eternity with its surpassing grandeur will endure forever.

### PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST

Every one who is to be an effective witness for Christ needs a personal relationship with Him. He must be born again as Jesus explained to Nicodemus. He must have a new heart. **“But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned”** (I Corinthians 2:14). Although Judas was with Jesus he did not know Him in the sense which true witnesses must know Him.

The apostles thought that to be an apostolic witness one must have been with Jesus from the time of His baptism through His ministry on earth. But Paul was an apostle and one of the most effective if not the most effective witness. He made his acquaintance with Jesus after His ascension. Others were effective witnesses in those days who did not have miraculous experiences, but they knew Jesus through His Spirit. They were regenerated men and women.

If out of us there are to flow rivers of living water, there must first be a reception of that water. It does not originate with us. There must be an infilling by faith in Christ. He who does not drink of the water of life cannot tell others what the water is and where and how to get it for themselves.

Christ permits His disciples to live in the most close and vital relationship with Himself. **“I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples”** (John 15:5-8).

The secret of the early disciples in their testimony was that they were witnesses, personal witnesses of Christ's life, death, resurrection and ascension. The secret of Paul's testimony was: **“I know whom I have believed.”** The missionary who can say: **“I know that my redeemer liveth”**; **“I know Him whom I believe”**; **“I know that He is my Saviour and that He is willing to become yours”** is the witness whose testimony wins.

Hudson Taylor, the founder of the China Inland Mission, always insisted that, more important than money, more important than large numbers of missionaries, more important than education, was a personal relationship with Christ, constant fellowship with Him and a love for the souls of lost men. When Mr. Taylor wanted to send someone to the great city of Nanking he believed that Mr. Duncan, an uncultured Scottish Highlander, was the best man available because he loved God, had grit and perseverance and a great love for souls. “He it was who had toiled at Chinese with the man at the wash-tub while waiting a better teacher, sitting beside him for hours, repeating sentences as he said them or verses that he read from the Gospels, and winning him to Christ at length by his very earnestness in seeking to make the Saviour known” (*The Growth of a Work of God*, p. 120).

### A PERIOD OF PREPARATION

Witnesses for Christ need a period of preparation. Jesus said, “**Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men**” (Mark 1:17). The disciples had three years of instruction and practical training under the personal leadership of Jesus. They went with Him as assistants in His work. They went out at His direction on preliminary preaching tours. They were permitted to work signs and wonders. The men who heard the disciples were surprised at their education, their knowledge of the law and their ability to teach: “**Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marveled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus**” (Acts 4:13).

Paul did not have a long period of training under Jesus, but he had a thorough training under Gamaliel. He knew the law and the prophets. All that he needed to do was to reinterpret them in the light of his knowledge of Jesus and under the guidance of His SPIRIT. This he seems to have been given three years to do in Arabia before he began his active missionary work.

The disciples of Christ need preparation today, in the study of the Bible, in the winning of men and in the methods of instructing men. We consider that our public school teachers need training in general, and also in the particular department in which they desire to teach. Surely then, they who are to teach the infinite mysteries of God and of his revealed will, and who are to apply those lessons to immortal souls, need careful preparation for this great work. The example of Jesus in this regard should not be ignored any more than in other particulars.

Some men think that preparation is of little importance because they see the head trained without the presence and enlightenment of the SPIRIT. Men who are indifferent to the acceptance of the Word of God, or who are skeptical as to the Deity of Christ cannot be fitted for effective service until they first come to know Jesus Christ, until they are born anew of the Holy Spirit. Then they will desire to exalt Christ. Then they will grow in grace. Then they will have a passion to win a lost world to Jesus Christ.

### OBEDIENCE TO CHRIST’S COMMANDS

The disciples were to do whatever Christ commanded.

They were to wait for the outpouring of the Spirit. They were to begin at Jerusalem and go on to the uttermost parts of the world. They were to teach men that the only way to be saved was by faith in Christ. They were to preach Christ crucified, Christ risen, Christ ascended, Christ reigning, and all that these included.

When Peter and the other apostles preached Christ risen from the dead and were told to be silent, they said, we ought **“to obey God rather than men”** (Acts 5:29). When Paul was called to preach Christ crucified, he could say, years afterward, that he had not been disobedient to the heavenly vision.

Whenever Christ’s disciples, in any period of history, have been disobedient to Christ’s commands there has been a woeful lack of power in their testimony. This is particularly noticeable among Unitarians. Unitarianism has made attempts at missions, writes Ernest Gordon, “But between Unitarian mission theory and mission empiry is a deep chasm indeed. ‘Honor all men’ wrote Dr. E.E. Hale, ‘makes it easier today for the Unitarian missionary (than for others) to deal with the Ute Indian or with the Fiji Islander. They meet not as enemies on two sides of an entrenchment but as common children of one God.’ so far theory. But have there ever been Unitarians missionaries to Utes or Fijis? Not to my knowledge.”

There was a Unitarian mission organized and opened in Japan. It was stated by its leader, Dr. Clay Macauley that American Unitarians had never undertaken anything of greater importance. From Mr. Fukazawa it received the benediction of “Jesus, Buddha, and the eight million Japanese deities.” But not enough money could be raised among Unitarians to finance it and it was given up. Thus it has been with Unitarians and with others who have not been obedient to Christ’s commands and have not been consecrated to His service.

A carpenter, who was questioned as to the correctness of some work he was doing upon a building, pulled out a note-book and looked at it. “I am obeying instructions,” he replied. “I’m not the contractor, and I’m going by the book.” A little later he ridiculed his friend because he refused to undertake some work on the Lord’s day. He was surprised when his friend replied: “I am going by the Book. Someone else is responsible for the final outcome; all I have to do is to obey instructions. If that is the safest way to do when you a building a house, it is the safest way to do when you are building a life.” And it is surely the best way for the disciples of Christ when they are trying to build up His kingdom.

Mr. D.L. Moody once said: “We are not told to be successful but we are told to be obedient. It is the work of the Spirit to make men believe; we must deliver the message.”

### **FAITH IN CHRIST’S PROMISES**

The disciples had faith in the promises of Christ. They would not have returned to Jerusalem if they had not had faith in His promises. They would not have waited for the out-pouring of the SPIRIT if they had not had faith in the Lord’s promises. They believed that Christ would go with them, that He would give them the message needed for the occasion and that He would win men to Himself.

When He had told them to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature, he had promised that he would be with them always even to the end of the world.

Every true missionary depends upon the promises of God. He says: **“So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it”** (Isaiah 55:11).

Again God’s Word declares: **“All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee”** (Psalm 22:27).

The missionary’s faith is often tried as it is in the turmoil in China today. Many who have labored there see the work of years scattered and seemingly undone. But knowing that God reigns on high and that His promises are forever sure we can rest in the certain hope that China shall one day sit at the feet of Jesus along with all other heathen lands.

### **A UNITED AIM**

As the disciples waited at Jerusalem they were all with one accord in one place. They were of one mind. Harmony did not have to be urged upon them, that spirit was within their hearts. The desire of the disciples centered in Christ. They wanted to exalt Him and to witness for Him. If these are our objects there will be harmony. When men want to exalt self harmony ceases. So long as their aims are selfish they will work for different objects.

Our Lord promises special power to those who agree together and pray together. The influence of a number of witnesses testifying to the same truth is powerful. When the period of waiting was over, when the Holy Spirit was sent, when all the disciples began to testify it was an amazing and wonderfully convincing testimony which they offered. As Dr. Guthrie used to say, if you separate the atoms which make the hammer, each would fall on the stone as a snow flake; but welded into one and wielded by the firm arm of the quarryman, it will break the massive rocks asunder. If you could divide the waters of Niagara into distinct and individual drops, they would be no more than the falling of rain; but in their united body they plunge over the great precipice with such power as to tear away the rocks below. The power in that great body of water is almost beyond calculation. When all the disciples of Christ on earth are ready to witness to the power and love of their Lord, there will be an awakening such as the world has never yet seen.

### **WHOLE-HEARTED PRAYER**

The disciples united in prayer. They were very earnest in prayer. **“These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication.”** They were desirous to be kept from falling; they wished to praise God and be prepared to witness. Now that Christ had gone from them they would think more deeply of how He had taught them to pray. They would remember that Jesus had told them that there were unlimited possibilities before them in answer to prayer. Those possibilities remain for us. The promises of our Lord have not been withdrawn. We may still remove difficulties; we may still receive the power of the Holy Spirit in answer to prayer.

Mr. George T. B. Davis while in China conducting a nation-wide distribution of New Testaments sent back word of some of the remarkable answers to prayer. In Yuanchow the students wanted to have a big lantern parade and then destroy the Christian chapel. Mr. Becker writes: "We prayed much. Just when the parade started, a big thunder storm came and all had to flee. It was the Lord! On the 20th we still had rain, so they began the parade in the evening of the 21st. We wondered how the Lord would intervene this time. About fifteen minutes after the parade started fire broke out in the house of the General. The soldiers drove the people home with rifles and knives. Some were killed and wounded. We are now caring for some of the severely wounded men. All the anti-Christian movement has gone. The people are as friendly as ever. No one could have foreseen such a change. (*When the Fire Fell*)

Mr. L.C. Osborn of Chao Cheng, Shantung, writes: "The missionaries of our station are waiting on God many hours a day for a mighty revival in China. He has revived our own hearts, and we are having the greatest results we have ever known. Personally the Lord has been getting me up as early as three o'clock in the morning to watch and pray. God's Word has never so precious. People have gotten under conviction right in their own homes and have prayed through to forgiveness. Our church is a different church. People are coming daily to be prayed with. Praise God! All glory be to Him!"

After telling of various results of the revival Mr. Osborn continues: "Upon the return of the Pu Chow workers to their station, ninety Li away, after the Chao Cheng revival, a revival broke out there and there was also much confession, making of restitution and getting right with God. It is spreading all over the field. The night before our party left headquarters for Tientsin, being ordered out by the American Consul, we had a communion service with the Chinese which was followed by prayer and testimony. The Chinese said, 'It used to be you missionaries and we Chinese but now we are one.' Praise God!

"Before this revival began it was impossible for the Chinese to see the importance of strict Sabbath Day observance, but now conviction seizes them and they are strongly reproved for desecration of the Lord's day. Praise God! The benefit of tithing was also never understood by many, but now some are having to make up years of back tithing, and tithing in general is a joy. Others who have never tithed are promising to do so.

"What God has done He can do again! What He has done in one place He can do in all places, therefore let us pray and believe for a mighty revival. A group of missionaries representing several believers now in Tientsin, are holding early morning prayer-meetings and are expecting God to revive the work in the midst of the years."

### **SELF-DENYING SERVICE**

The early disciples had already begun a life of self-denying service. Before this many had turned back from following Jesus when He did not want to become a temporal king and lead them to freedom. Those who understood and loved Jesus best had decided to take up their cross and follow Him. After He had left them, soon there were many who were added to the church who were ready to give up all of their personal possessions and follow Him.

The Moravian church has been a remarkable missionary church. They have chosen a striking symbol to inspire them. On one side there is an altar, on the other side there is an ox, and underneath are the words written: "Ready for either." They have held before their people the ideal of being ready for sacrificing or service. The results have been amazing and inspiring to the Christian world.

Kate Marsden, the friend of the Siberian lepers, writes: "The claims of humanity are insufficient, alone, to sustain prolonged consecration to the service of the suffering: a higher inspiration is required." One who visited a hospital where the victims of a dread disease were sheltered, said to the nurse who accompanied him: "You must have a great deal of enthusiasm of humanity to keep you in such a place as this." "Enthusiasm of humanity! sir," the nurse replied: "that motive would not keep us here for a single day; the love of Christ constraineth us!"

Wendell Phillips was asked, not long before his death, "Mr. Phillips, did you ever consecrate yourself to God?" His reply was: "Yes, when I was a boy fourteen years of age, in the old church at the North End, I heard Lyman Beecher preach on the theme, 'You belong to God,,' and I went home after that service, threw myself on the floor in my room, with locked doors, and prayed, 'O God I belong to Thee; take what is thine own. I ask this, that whenever a thing be wrong it may have no temptation over me; whenever a thing be right it may take no courage to do it.' From that day to this it has been so."

### **DEPENDENCE UPON THE HOLY SPIRIT**

The disciples waited for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon them. They did not receive power until He was given. They were taught at the outset that it was not by might nor by power but by the Spirit of God that their witnessing might be effective.

Theodore Cuyler used to illustrate the power of the Spirit in this way. He said that when he was a student in Princeton one of his professors had constructed a large bar of iron bent into the form of a horseshoe. It hung suspended from an iron bar above it. It held in suspension a four thousand pound weight attached to it. The horseshoe was not welded or bolted to the bar above it, but through the wire coiled around it there ran an electric current which converted it into a magnet. Stop the flow of electricity for an instant and the great horseshoe dropped. "So," said Dr. Cuyler, 'does the lifting power of the Christian's life come from the currents of spiritual influence which flow into his heart from the living Christ.' The strength of the Almighty One enters into the believer.

The great missionary, Jonathan Goforth, says: "I have the strongest of convictions that it would pay many, many fold for the church at home and abroad to cease for a season its busy round of activities and seek for the Holy Spirit's power as for hidden treasure. Then, as a missionary in Korea said after the power of the Spirit came upon the workers at Pyeng Yang, 'He did more in half a day than all we could have done in half a year'; or, as our preachers and others in Chan-te-fu exclaimed after the Holy Spirit had swept through the assembly there for ten days with the fires of judgment: 'God has done exceeding abundantly above all that we asked or thought. In ten days he has done more than we could have done in ten years.'

If we would evangelize the world in our day we must get back to the Pentecostal Factor.”

Mr. D.L. Moody said: “If I could stir up a hundred Christians and induce them to seek this gift of service, to get full of the Holy Ghost, it would result in thousands of conversions. When we were in Philadelphia a lady said to me, ‘Mr. Moody, can women have this power?’ I told her I saw no reason why anyone should not have it who wanted to work for God. Women need it as much as men. ‘Well,’ she said, ‘if I can have it I want it. I have also a Sunday school class, and they are unconverted.’ A week from that time she came to me and said, ‘I have got it. The Lord has blessed me. My husband has been converted, and five of my Sunday school class.’ That was the result of that woman’s receiving the power of the Holy Ghost. It spread all through the church of which she was a member, and the people, seeing that she had something which they had not, began to inquire, and as a result of the quickening of that woman five hundred members were added to the church” (Sermon, *The Gift of the Holy Ghost*, by D.L. Moody).

Dr. R.A. Torrey in telling of his work in Chicago says: “One night a lot of our students came home from the Pacific Garden Mission full of rejoicing over the number of conversions there had been that night. “We had a great time at the mission tonight,” they said, “a large number of drunkards came to the front and accepted Christ as their Saviour.” “The next day,” continues Dr. Torrey, “I met Harry Monroe, superintendent of the mission on the street, ‘Harry,’ I said, ‘the boys tell me you had a great time at the mission last night.’ ‘Would you like to know how it came about?’ he asked. ‘It pleased the Holy Spirit to illumine the face of Jesus and sinners just saw him and believed.’ It was a rather unique way of putting it but it well stated the truth. It is only when the Holy Spirit bears His testimony to Jesus that men see and believe.”

To quote again from the life of Hudson Taylor: “Money was not the chief thing in the Lord’s work, especially money easily given, under the influence of emotion. Much as he appreciated their kind intention, he would rather have each one go home to ask the Lord very definitely what he would have them do. If it were to give of their substance, they could send a contribution to their own or any other society. But in view of the appalling facts of heathenism, it might be much more costly gifts the Lord was seeking; perhaps a son or daughter or one’s own life-service. No amount of money could save a single soul. What was wanted was that men and women filled with the Holy Spirit should give themselves to the work in China and to the work of prayer at home. For the support of God-sent missionaries funds would never be lacking” (*The Growth of a Work of God*, pp. 63-64).

## QUESTIONS

(Acts 1:8, 14; 2:1)

1. Under whom were these witnesses trained?
2. What were they taught that they must give up to follow Christ?
3. Give examples to show that in the past ages men tend to hold to the world.
4. What is meant by a personal relationship with Christ?
5. Show from the teaching of Christ that this is essential to a witness?
6. Show the value of a period of preparation for a witness?

7. What was the practice of Jesus in training witnesses?
8. Can one be an effective witness who will not obey Christ's commands?
9. Will another message do as well as Christ's Gospel?
10. What has been the result in every period of history when witnesses have been disobedient to Christ?
11. What indicates that these early disciples had faith in Christ's promises?
12. What are some of the promises upon which the missionary can depend?
13. What indicates that the early disciples had a united aim?
14. What was their chief desire?
15. What effect does selfishness have upon harmony?
16. In what manner did these disciples pray?
17. How do we know that Christ can remove difficulties in answer to prayer at the present time?
18. How did the willingness of the disciples to render self-denying service compare with their own record in earlier days?
19. From what source does the witness gain strength for self-denying service?
20. Could the early witnesses do effective service with the aid of Holy Spirit? Can we?

**~ end of chapter 3 ~**

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