

After The But... The Here, Near, And Far Acts 1:7-8

Summary: In Acts 1:8 the Apostles were tempted to stay with what was comfortable and easy, but Jesus challenged them to change the world

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The word “but” is a small word, only 3 letters, however when I looked up its definition in the Dictionary, I found not one, but several different ways the word could be used.

It can be a conjunction, a preposition, an adverb, a pronoun, or a noun. It's very important in the little phrase, *“After the but comes the truth.”*

I googled the phrase to see if it could provide a clue to its origin. I got several hits. Three of those hits were for a review of a restaurant in California.

They had been posted in Trip Advisor, and read: “They mean well, no doubt, and as far as Mexican food is concerned it's the best in Marbella... But (and after the "but" comes the truth), the staff can be slightly arrogant.”

“After the but comes the truth,” is the theme of these Easter messages. So, this morning I want to take you to an afternoon forty days after the resurrection.

Jesus's apostles had watched Him die on a cross on Friday and then saw Him, after he rose from the dead, on Sunday.

They spent forty days after the resurrection with Him. They ate with Him, they talked to Him, and they listened as He taught them.

We're told in Acts 1:3, during the forty days after His crucifixion, He appeared to the Apostles from time to time, and He proved to them in

many ways that He was actually alive, while He talked to them about the Kingdom of God.

But they just didn't get it. After all they had been through, after all they had heard Him say, and after the crucifixion and resurrection they still didn't get it.

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Acts 1:6, *"Then they gathered around him and asked him, 'Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?'"*

It was like they only saw the entire Easter weekend thing as a prelude to Jesus overthrowing Rome and setting up His kingdom.

But this verse doesn't really give you the full picture. In the Greek, this verse doesn't say they *"asked him,"* it says they *"kept asking him."* If it had been me, I would've said, *"Seriously, haven't you heard a thing I've said?"*

But in Acts 1:7, *"He said to them: 'It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.'"*

Maybe it would've been a good time to remind them of what He said in Mark 13:32, *"But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."*

While this might be a good time to segue into a discussion on end times, I'm not. Instead we are going to the next verse.

Acts 1:8, *"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."*

And here's our *"But."* Jesus had spent three years with the apostles. Three years that they watched Him teach and watched Him heal.

They had seen Him crucified. They had seen Him after God raised Him from the dead and now the future of the movement that He had started comes down to these words where Jesus defines what His Church will do.

So, He tells them, “*You May be Comfortable Where You Are, But...*” They were just ordinary men. They had been tradesmen, fishermen and bureaucrats.

Some of them were nationalists who longed for Israel to return to her glory days, and others just wanted to go along to get along. But as far as we know, none of them had travelled more than a hundred miles from where they were born.

The closest they had come to travelling into a foreign land was their brief forays into Samaria. Which was more like going into a sketchy neighborhood.

Their entire lives had been spent in an area about the size of Maryland. They were comfortable with their customs and their language. They knew the best places to eat and the places to avoid.

They knew the people and they knew the territory. They were comfortable, and besides, would it be fair to expand outside of Jerusalem and Judea before everyone in Jerusalem and Judea had the chance to respond to the message of Jesus?

Those were valid concerns, “*But...*” Jesus knew that if Christianity was going to become a world changing movement, they would have to change.

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With this command Jesus reminded the Apostles, “*You may be comfortable with who you are with, BUT...*” For all their differences the Apostles were a pretty homogeneous group.

They had been brought up in the same culture, they shared a common language, and they had a common faith.

For the Apostles, Israel was a small island of righteousness in a sea of wickedness. They were Jews like everybody else, Jesus was the Jewish messiah, and that settled it.

Why would they even think about reaching beyond the borders of what they had always thought of as God’s promised land, occupied by God’s people.

Maybe you’ve heard of the Hunt-Lenox Globe or maybe not. It dates from around 1510. It’s the is the third-oldest known terrestrial globe in existence, housed in the New York Public Library.

On that globe, down by Asia, is a Latin inscription which, translated into English, reads: “*Here are dragons.*”

Scholars tell us that wasn’t inscribed because someone had actually seen dragons, but simply because they had no idea what might be in that area.

I’m sure, if the apostle had drawn a map, they would have indicated the area outside of Israel as “*Here are pagans, and here are heathens.*”

For the Apostles, there was no need to reach beyond Judea because there was nobody worth reaching outside of Judea. And those were all valid concerns, “*But...*”

Jesus knew that if Christianity was going to become a world changing movement, they would have to change and when they did, Christianity did. Within a generation the church was made up of more Gentiles than Jews.

Jesus was telling his followers that day, *“You may be comfortable with how you worship, BUT...”* For all their lives, the Apostle had worshipped the same way.

They knew what was acceptable and what wasn't. They knew what was expected and what wasn't. They had grown up singing the same songs, hearing the same scriptures being read and the same prayers being prayed. They could probably do it in their sleep.

For the Apostles, Christianity was Judaism with Jesus. For them life would go on, they would continue to go to the synagogue, hear the Old Testament Scripture being read, and listen to the same prayers being recited that had been recited for over a thousand years.

By the time of Jesus, Jewish worship music was primarily performed by the families of singers who officiated in the Temple.

The participation of the congregation in the Temple song would be limited to certain responses, such as *“Amen,” “Halleluiah,”* or formulas like *“Since His mercy endures forever,”* etc.

Ancient Hebrew music, like much Arabic music today, was probably monophonic, meaning there's no harmony.

They were probably thinking; what if the new people like different music than we like, or want to worship different than we've always worshipped? Those were valid concerns, *“But...”*

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Jesus knew that if Christianity was going to become a world changing movement they would have to change. And it wasn't very long that the Christian worship experience was very different than with what the Apostles had known.

Jesus knew there would be a temptation among his followers to become complacent and comfortable with their newfound faith and that the longer they stayed in Jerusalem the easier it would be to get into a rut.

So, Jesus told his followers that if they were going to be obedient it was going to require change on their behalf and nobody likes change.

In Robert Kriegel's book, *"If It Ain't Broke, Break it,"* he writes, *"The only people who like change are busy cashiers and babies with wet diapers."* Kriegel also coined the phrase, *"Sacred cows make the best burgers."*

There's an Old Testament verse that has promoted me out of various ruts through the years. It's Amos 6:1, *"Woe to you who are complacent in Zion."*

Acts 1:8, *"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."*

There's a plan for "Here." It's in the "here" that we're most comfortable. It's "here" that things are the most familiar. It is "here" that we need to make sure we have the framework in place for the near and the far.

For the disciples the "here" was Jerusalem and Judea. This was the place they had known, the place they went to school, the place they had won their victories and experienced their failures.

Jesus wasn't telling them to leave Jerusalem and Judea, He was telling them they would have to add to Jerusalem and Judea.

In our case, this is our "here," this building, and we aren't leaving our "here," but there are things that we need to do to make the "here" more effective as we seek to reach our community for Christ.

But there's also a plan for the "Near." Not only were the Apostles told they would be witnesses at home, but also in Samaria. Samaria was only about 40 miles from the hill that the Apostles stood on that day, but it might as well have been a world apart.

There was history between the Jews and the Samaritans. They had a common heritage, but hundreds of years before things changed, so they had very little to do with each other.

That was the next area that the Apostles were told they would be witnesses to. Their first reaction must have been: Why? There's lots to do here, and if the Samaritans really want to hear about Jesus they can come here.

But Jesus is more about building bridges than building walls. As evidenced by some of the stories in the Gospels. Including the story in John 4. We read the account in John 4:3-4, *"So he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee. Now he had to go through Samaria."*

Technically Jesus didn't have to go through Samaria. Jews avoided Samaria all the time, but here we read the story of Jesus meeting the Samaritan woman at the well.

The story ends in John 4:39-41, *"Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me everything I ever did.' So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers."*

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Conclusion

Let's go back to Jesus's words that day, Acts 1:8, *"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."*

You see, there's also a plan for the "Far." We live in a world that has shrunk. Most of us are accustomed to some type of contact with the ends of the world today. We can jump on a plane and be almost anywhere in the world within 24 hours.

But two thousand years ago, not so much. Unless you were a sailor or a soldier chances are you didn't wander far from your home. Travel was difficult, often by foot.

There was no Expedia to book your accommodations through. So, for the Apostles, who had never been more than 120 miles from where they were born, the ends of the earth was unimaginable.

Not only were the ends of the earth far away but they were populated by people with strange languages, strange customs, and different faith backgrounds.

But the reality was that the unimaginable became possible. With a little push or two within a generation the Christian Church had spread to the ends of the known world.

Remember Back in verse 7, the disciples asked Jesus when He would restore the kingdom of Israel, or when His return would be.

Jesus replied that it was not for them to know the answer to that question. What they needed to focus on in the present moment was being a witness to the ends of the earth, or to the entire world.

In addition to seeing the lost saved, we are to preach the gospel to the ends of the earth in order to help usher in the kingdom of God. How do we do all of this? According to verse 8, it is through the power of the Holy Spirit.

So, When Jesus returns for his church, we will stand before him, the Holy, righteous judge. And we'll give an account to Him for what we've done with what we've been given in this life. Will we be found faithful when He returns?

The task of taking the gospel to the ends of the earth is a daunting one. But the Lord in His mercy, from the very start in Acts 1, has provided all the necessary resources to accomplish the job.

It's up to us to decide if we'll appropriate those resources and put them to use.