

Spirit Empowered Witnesses

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[0 : 00] So Acts chapter 1. In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day he was taken up to heaven after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.

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 40 days and spoke about the kingdom of God. 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 speak about. For John baptized with water, but in few days he will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. Then they gathered around him and asked him, Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel? He said to them, it's not for you to know the times or dates the father has set by his own authority, but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you.

[1 : 13] And you will be my witness in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes and a cloud hid him for their sight.

They were looking intently up into the sky and he was going when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. 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 will have seen him go into heaven.

Amen. Thank you so much, Daniela. So for the next number of months, we are going to be heading into the book of Acts and we're excited to be starting this new series in the book of Acts.

And it's our prayer that with the Lord's help, it will be an encouragement and it will be a blessing to us all as we journey through Acts together. So basically, the book of Acts picks up right from where the gospels leave off.

[2 : 25] The writer of the book of Acts is Luke. Well, Luke actually starts the book of Acts right where he left off in his gospel.

Luke ends his gospel talking about the ascension of Jesus. And then Luke starts the book of Acts talking about the very same thing, the ascension of Jesus.

So the book of Acts, as the fellow said, just keeps rolling right on from where the gospels leave off. And basically, what we see in this opening passage, in our passage this morning, in verses 1 to 11, is that the Lord Jesus, before he ascended into heaven, he left his followers with a mission, with a task, and a purpose.

And this mission is something that he wanted his followers to carry out until he returned or called them home.

Well, the amazing thing is this. The Lord Jesus has not yet returned. So the mission that Jesus gave to his followers at the beginning of the book of Acts is still very much the mission that we are all called to carry out today.

[3 : 47] Until Jesus returns or calls us home, the mission that Jesus gave his followers at the beginning of the book of Acts is still our mission today.

So this morning, as we enter into this series in the book of Acts, I want us to briefly consider what is that mission and how can we carry it out?

So first, what is that mission? What is the mission of the book of Acts? And what is still our mission today? Well, when we consider what is the mission of the book of Acts, when we consider what is still our mission today, verse 8 in our passage this morning that Daniela read for us really sums it all up.

In fact, verse 8 is known as the summary verse of the entire book of Acts. If you simply want a summary of the mission of the book of Acts, and if you simply want a summary of what our mission is still today, verse 8 sums it all up.

The Lord Jesus, before he ascended into heaven, said, But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

[5 : 19] The risen Lord Jesus, before he ascended into heaven, said to his followers, You will be my witnesses. This is the mission of the book of Acts, and this is still our mission today, to be his witnesses.

Now, this word for witness was, in that day, a word that was used in court. So back then, just like it is today, a witness in a courtroom is someone that has seen, heard, or experienced something taking place, and they are in court to tell about what they have seen, what they have heard, and what they have experienced.

Well, in a similar way, as Christians, we are called to be his witnesses. We are called to share, or to present, all that we have seen, heard, and experienced about Jesus, about our Lord, about our Savior.

You know, it is God, he is the one who does the changing of hearts. God is the one that does the saving. It's very important for us to remember that. That's his part, and we can't carry that weight on our own shoulders, whether people are saved or not.

That's God's part. But what we are called to do is we are called to share what we have seen, what we have heard, and what we have experienced about the Lord Jesus.

[6 : 59] And we are called to do this wherever he places us. We see in verse 8 that Jesus said, you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

So Jerusalem is where they were at this point. Judea and Samaria are then their wider circles, and then obviously the ends of the earth is beyond that again. Really, I think to sum it all up, Jesus here was encouraging his followers at that time to have a heart for the whole world, but then to be his witnesses wherever in that world that the Lord placed them.

And we will actually see in the book of Acts that the Lord would place his followers in all of these places. You know, some would stay near to Jerusalem, and that is great, they were to be witnesses there.

Some of his followers would go to Judea, that is great, they were to be witnesses there. Some of his followers would go to Samaria, and they were to be witnesses there, and then obviously some would go to the ends of the earth.

And one example that we see in the book of Acts is Paul. Later we'll see that Paul would take the gospel to a brand new place, he would take the gospel into Europe. Our God clearly has a heart for every tribe, for every tongue, for every nation, and I think that the point is this, we are called to be his witnesses wherever in the world that he has placed us at that time.

[8 : 44] whether it be West Cork, or whether it be West Africa, or whether it be West Virginia, or wherever we could think of.

Wherever we are placed, wherever each one of us are placed, there's no accident in where the Lord has each and every one of us. And wherever we are placed at this time, he has called us to share what we have seen, heard, and experienced about him.

Whether that be with our neighbors, whether that be to friends or family, we are called to share. And that basically is the mission of the book of Acts, and that is still our mission today, to be witnesses for Jesus.

Well, in terms of how we do that, in terms of ways in which we can point people to Jesus, in terms of ways that we can highlight or present or share Jesus with others, well, it is multifaceted in that there are far more ways than one to be a witness for Jesus.

And I'm very briefly just going to share a couple of things. So one way that we can be a witness for Jesus is through our words.

[10 : 15] Sharing with others a word of testimony, something that the Lord has done in our lives, or sharing with people a verse or a passage from God's word, or sharing in some way with our words, is a wonderful way to be a witness.

to be a witness for the Lord Jesus. And I'm not talking about standing on the street, absolutely roaring and shouting in people's faces.

No, when the Lord leads in natural ways, sharing a word of testimony or a passage or a verse is a wonderful way to be a witness for the Lord Jesus.

In fact, time and time again, we see in Scripture Jesus telling people to go and tell others what he has done for them. And I really love the example of the demon-possessed man in Mark's Gospel. Remember the demon-possessed man? He was possessed by a legion of demons. He lived in the graveyard. He was shackled up in chains and he was in anguish.

[11 : 23] He was in pain. He was tormented in every way. And remember, the Lord Jesus set him free from all of that. And when the Lord Jesus set him free, what did the man want to do?

He wanted to get into that boat, basically. He wanted to cross over to the other side. He wanted to go with Jesus. He wanted to stay with Jesus and follow him everywhere he went. But what did Jesus tell him?

Jesus essentially told him no. See, it's okay at times to say no. Jesus told him no. And what did Jesus tell him to do? Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how he has had mercy on you.

Jesus told him to go and tell. Jesus told him to go and tell what the Lord had done for him, wherever the Lord had placed him.

And you know what? When we think about it, we might not have been demon-possessed. We might not have lived in a graveyard.

[12 : 33] We might not have been chained up physically. But just like the demon-possessed man, every single one of us, as believers, we have been forgiven.

We have been set free from the ultimate chains of sin, death, and the enemy. And therefore, we all have this incredible, precious, sweet story to tell, as believers of what the Lord Jesus has done for us.

And the Lord, as he leads us, as he guides us, he wants us to share this with others. We're called to be witnesses through our words.

Well, to add another thing, we're also called to be witnesses, I think, through our actions.

Sometimes, or maybe a lot of the time, actions can speak a lot louder than words.

And I think we need both words and actions. It's not one or the other. But sometimes, actions can be a far more powerful witness than any word spoken.

[13 : 44] A kind, generous action or gesture can be a powerful witness of the love of Christ. You know, going back to where Amy is from in Iowa, I know I was talking about snow last week.

Well, I'm going to talk about snow again this week. I'm a little bit snow-mad at the moment, but when it snows, I'm not sure if it's like this all across America or if it's like this in other countries, but when it snows and you live in a town, you're responsible for shoveling the snow off the public footpath that's in front of your own home.

Well, this one family, what they do is when it snows, they shovel the footpath in front of their own home and then they also shovel the footpath off the home of their elderly neighbors.

And this simple, kind act has led to them being able to share the gospel in incredible ways to such a degree that they almost have it, it seems.

whether it be a smile, whether it be a meal to someone who is sick, whether it be a warm embrace, a generous, kind action can be such a wonderful witness of the heart of Jesus to a watching and a hurting world.

[15 : 08] And remember, God uses small things in big ways for his glory. Well, just to add one more thing, another way that we can be a witness for the Lord Jesus is through our attitudes.

I'm not going to say much about this, only that in Philippians chapter 2, we are encouraged to have the same attitude or mindset of Christ, which is an attitude of joyful, servant-hearted love and care for others.

In this world, when people see you not always wanting to put yourself first, in this world, if people see us actually joyfully wanting to serve others, often that is such a contrast to what we see in this world.

And it is such a powerful witness of the heart of Jesus. Words, actions, attitudes. Now, looking at all of this, looking at our mission that we have all been given, for some of us, it just might be a little bit overwhelming.

You know, we might be feeling that we don't have much to offer, you know, that how can we be any of a witness? We might be feeling very weak and ordinary in many ways. But I want to encourage

each and every one of us, whether you're older or younger, that no matter how weak we might think that we are, through our words, through our attitudes, through our actions, we can all be his witnesses in one way or another.

[16:54] God uses small things in big ways for his glory. A missionary to Africa tells the story of this very weak, frail, elderly woman who was blind and she could neither read nor write.

But she was reached with the gospel. She became a believer and although she couldn't see, although she couldn't read or write, although she was very, very frail, when she became a believer, she wanted to be a witness to others.

She wanted to share Jesus with others. So she asked a missionary that she knew to give her a Bible and she asked him to put a fold on the page where John chapter 3 is, to put a crease on that page and to underline verse 16.

So the missionary did this for her and he gave her the Bible. Well a couple of months later, the missionary kind of wanted to check in with this lady to see how she was doing and he also wondered what was she doing with this Bible.

She couldn't see, she couldn't read, she couldn't write. So he was told that each day she went to the local school, it happened to be a boys' school. So he followed her one day and he sat and he watched her.

[18:15] Of course she didn't know that he was there at all. Well when the boys came running out of school, she couldn't see them but she could most certainly hear them so when they came running out she would kind of put her two hands up and she would say, help, help, will you come over here and help me and the boys would come over to help her.

And she would hand them the Bible and she would say, will you open the page that's creased and will you read the line that's underlined? And they would do this for her and they would read to her John chapter 3 verse 16, for God so loved the world he gave his one and only son so that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life and then very, very simply she would say to them, do you want to know what this means?

And she would tell them about Jesus. Well the missionary found out later that 24 of these school boys that this blind, weak lady led to the Lord became pastors all over Africa and those churches are still standing today.

As I said, you know, we might be feeling weak, we might be feeling ordinary but if a blind, weak, elderly, frail woman who could not read or write can be a witness through her words, her actions, her attitudes in her own way, well then so can we all through the power of the Holy Spirit.

And that is the big thing about all of this, that is the big encouraging life-giving truth about all of this and about the entire book of Acts and about our mission today is that we have not been left alone in this world to be his witnesses on our own strength and in our own wisdom.

[20:11] Now Jesus said, but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, to the ends of the earth.

We have as believers been given the Holy Spirit to encourage us, to lead us, to empower us, to be effective witnesses for the mission that we have been given.

As believers, this side of Pentecost, every one of us has the Holy Spirit living in us, he dwells within us, and it is through him working in us and through us that we can be effective witnesses for the Lord Jesus.

You'll notice in verse 4 there that the believers in this passage, they were told to wait, they were told not to do anything until the Holy Spirit comes. And of course we know that the Spirit came at Pentecost.

Well now this side of Pentecost just like the believers in the book of Acts, we are all Spirit-empowered witnesses. So whether it be through our words, our actions, our attitudes, we have been given the Holy Spirit who will graciously and kindly help us and empower us for the mission that we have been given.

[21:36] You know, this passage really is not at all about us feeling bad, from maybe feeling like we haven't been great witnesses in the past.

This passage is not at all about us feeling condemned that we haven't been maybe great witnesses in the past. And this passage is not at all about us leaving, feeling the weight of being his witnesses on our own strength.

This whole passage is all about us being encouraged. encouraged. This passage is about us being so, so encouraged that each of us, despite how weak we might feel, each of us have been given this incredible mission and each of us have been given all that we need and more, true to Holy Spirit, to be effective in this mission that we have been given.

I think we must always remember that our Lord never asks us to do anything without also giving us the means to do it. And that is what we see in the book of Acts.

That's what we will see as we journey through the book of Acts, that the Lord gave his followers this incredible mission, but the Lord also, through the Spirit, gave them all that they needed and more to be successful on that mission.

[23 : 01] And you know what? Our story today is the same. As we live our lives, let us be encouraged that we have been given this God-given mission to point people to Jesus.

But let us also be encouraged that we have been given the Holy Spirit who will help us, who will encourage us on the mission that we have been given.

So let us remember the mission, that we have been given, and let us be encouraged that we've been given this mission, and let us be encouraged that as we move forward, we have all that we need and more.

And we'll make many mistakes, but through it all, the Spirit will lead us and guide us, and even in our mistakes, as believers, he will help us to be a witness to other people.

people. He will help us. Let us be encouraged. Let's pray together. Lord, we thank you that you have given us this incredible mission.

[24 : 05] And as we look at the opening verses of the book of Acts, we see the mission you gave to your followers back then. And we are kind of reminded that this is still our mission today.

Lord, that we would be your witnesses. And Lord, we know that we're all different. You have made us all different. And we will all share in different ways. But in whatever way it is, Lord, I pray you'd help us to point people to you.

And Lord, I just want to thank you that you have given us the Holy Spirit who lives inside us, who will lead us and guide us. Lord, I pray that no one would leave this morning feeling bad or feeling condemned or feeling the weight of being a witness for you on our own strength.

I pray that each of us would go with a sense of hope and a sense of encouragement and a sense of excitement. That you have involved us in all of this.

You want to use us and you do use us. And Lord, we thank you that you have given us your spirit. And when we make mistakes, Lord, we thank you that there's grace for that. And you bring us on again.

[25 : 16] Lord, I pray that we'd be an encouragement to each other as we press on together as a church. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, we're going to sing a final song.

We're going to sing forever. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray.