

Our Job Is To Witness To Jesus Christ

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- [0 : 0 0] And since we would die without it, we ask that you will give us ears to hear it, not the vain babbling of men, but the life-giving word of God.
- As we turn our minds to the scriptures, we ask this in Christ's name. Amen. The passage that I want you to look at is Acts chapter 1, and it was read as the lesson this morning.
- It begins at verse 6 of chapter 1 on page 112 in the New Testament section, and I'm only going to deal with it as far as the end of the paragraph, which is the end of verse 11.
- It marks a very special point in the whole history of the world, if you want, because it is that point which comes between the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the ascension of Jesus Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit.
- That kind of hiatus in history. If you're a good Anglican, you will know that this is sometimes called Fithur Sunday.
- [1 : 3 3] No, maybe you don't have to be a good Anglican. But it's that wonderful verse from the prayer book, that where Christ has gone, we may hither ascend.
- So I hope that we will all end up thither. I just see, though, that this is a little hiatus in time between the resurrection and Christ's ascension.
- And it comes as a very special point in the life of the disciples. They had heard the teaching of Jesus in the parables, in the miracles and all that he had done.
- They had witnessed the trial, death, and resurrection of Jesus. All those things they had seen was part of their experience.
- And they were looking for the answer to the question, where do we go from here?
- [2 : 4 4] I don't like the question that we have as a congregation. Where do we go from here? The answer that was given to them is essentially the answer that we too must receive. Where do we go from here?
- And so they turned to Jesus and they said, Well, will you at this time restore the kingdom? They thought that the essential purpose of God was a restoration program.
- And so they asked, Will you restore the kingdom? And Christ said to them something which I just find profoundly helpful.
- He said to them that that's not for you to know. Now, most Christians are thought to be those who know what the other people in the world don't know.
- But if you examine the New Testament carefully, one of the things that you will find is that there's a lot of things that Christians are told they won't know and they don't know.
- [3 : 5 7] And that's significant in a world that thinks it knows everything. Christian disciples begin their life as disciples in this instance by being told, That's not for you to know.
- You're not to become a great expert on religion. There's something for you to know, but you're not to be a great expert on religion. It's not for you to know the times and the seasons and to be able to tell people this is going to happen or that's going to happen.

It's not for you to have what Paul says in Corinthians is the loveless knowledge which counts ultimately for nothing.

You may, as Paul suggests, know in part. But again, that's not to be the kind of knowledge which Paul tells us puffs us up with our own importance.

The knowledge which is given to the disciples is to be not the knowledge that puffs up, but the love that builds. So there is something that is cardinal, an essential principle for the disciples.

[5 : 14] And that is, it's not what they know, it's who they know. That they know Jesus Christ. I met a man the other day who said, I really have trouble with Christianity.

I'm the kind of person that can only believe if I see, you know. And I tried to explain to him. I said, well, there is a kind of knowledge which comes to us when we know all the mysteries of the DNA molecule or something, the source of life.

That's a kind of knowledge that we have. But that the knowledge on which our faith is built is the knowledge that comes from knowing Jesus Christ.

I apologize to tell you that because, you know, we do in our society pride ourselves on a vast array of knowledge which is right at our fingertips.

But it is useless to us unless we know Jesus Christ. So what he said to the disciples is that I'm not going to restore the kingdom to Israel, as you think.

[6 : 26] That's not for you to know about that. And he said to them, the thing that you're to do is that you will be given special power to do a very particular job.

In other words, they are to be those who wait on the Lord and find opportunity to bear witness to him. You see what the passage says?

You will receive power through the Holy Spirit which will come upon you. And you will be witnesses to me.

So that they are given a work to do. The work is to bear witness to Jesus Christ. We as a congregation are given a job to do.

And it's not to know all the answers to life's problems. But in the midst of life's problems, to bear witness to what we do know about Jesus Christ.

[7 : 36] I know Jesus Christ. And we're to bear witness to that fact. Now, you see, even in the work of the church, we can't do this work without the enabling power of the Holy Spirit.

It's the only way we can do it. And Christ says, you will receive power after that the Holy Spirit has come upon you.

And you will bear witness to me. That work of witnessing depends on the business of empowering. Now, lots of religious people try and do religious work without the enabling of the Holy Spirit.

And you can't do it. You will become frustrated, disappointed, and you will turn away and say, it's not worth it.

It's too much. You will simply burn out. Because you can't do it, no matter how high your intention is. And so Christ says to them, you will be given power.

[8 : 48] And in that power, you will bear witness to me. And that is the essential life of the church, to be empowered by the Holy Spirit to bear witness to Jesus Christ.

That's why this church is here. And if it gets in the way of doing that, we should knock it down. And if it enables us to do that, we should thank God for it and make sure that it's here.

And it serves us well in the work that we are called to do and which we are empowered to do by the Holy Spirit. And that is in bearing witness to Jesus Christ. That is the essential thing in our world.

That's what we're to do. And we can only do that in the power of the Holy Spirit. I'm dying to tell you more about this wonderful character that I met in Kenya who was a missionary from Sweden.

He was a, the thing that struck me most about him was that he was very interested in Jewish people. You have to go to Sweden to figure that one out.

[9 : 56] But he told me, he's the same age as I am, pretty well over the hill. And he, he was going back for two years in a very primitive mission station in Tanzania to build a school for the deaf, for training deaf children.

And he told me that in, in Tanzania, he had been there working for the missionary society that he's worked for all his life as a builder.

And another builder was, was sent out by SIDA. That's spelled S-I-D-A instead of C-I-D-A. That's pretty subtle too.

But I, it's the Swedish inter-something developmentalist instead of the Canadian. We both call them SIDA. But, uh, he was sent out by them and this other builder was sent out and was paid five times as much as he was paid for doing the same job.

You can imagine the bitterness and the rancor. Well, there wasn't any. He said, but the wonderful thing is that God blessed my money much more than he blessed all his money.

[11 : 12] You know, and, uh, I, I found that a very profound statement. And, uh, and I just pray that God will wonderfully bless our money, the gifts we give, you know, that we will be able to do all sorts of things with those, with that.

And that God will wonderfully bless that money. That, you see, because we can't do things apart from the empowering of the Holy Spirit. Even our money isn't worth that much apart from that work.

So, Jesus says, the job you will be given to do is to bear witness to Jesus Christ. Now, bearing witness to Jesus Christ has a very noble line of succession behind it.

Because when Jesus stood before Pontius Pilate and Pilate said to him, Are you a king? And Jesus said, You say that I am a king.

Well, that may be. But he said, For this I was born. I came into the world for this.

[12 : 23] The thing I came into the world for was to bear witness to the truth. The truth concerning God. And all who are on the side of truth listen to my voice.

So, there was Pilate looking down on the bound and scourged, thorn-crowned figure of Jesus Christ. And Jesus says, My job is to bear witness to the truth.

And then, you see, when his disciples are saying, Well, where do we go from here? He says to them, Your job is to bear witness to me. That's your job.

And he says that to the apostles. And you're to bear witness to me in Jerusalem, in Judea, in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth. Remember, remember when Peter and John went to the temple gate, and there was a man who cried for alms, and they said, Silver and gold have we none, but such as we have we give you in the name of Jesus Christ.

Stand up and walk. And around that miracle, there was all the preaching and all the declaration and all the bearing witness to, We didn't do this. Jesus Christ did this.

[13 : 41] That was in Jerusalem. In Judea, as in Samaria, where the Ethiopian eunuch called for Peter to come. And Peter said, I shouldn't be talking to you.

You're a Gentile. I'm a Jew. But I'll tell you about Jesus Christ. And then they went to Samaria. And Philip preached Christ in Samaria.

And Simon the magician threw away all his magic arts and became a believer in Jesus Christ because Philip had told him about him. We're getting there.

You see, Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, unto the uttermost parts of the earth. And so Peter and Paul both head for Rome.

And in Rome, the gospel is established at the very center of that empire, the tentacles of which reach right down to our own day.

[14 : 39] And through that empire, Jesus Christ was born witness to unto the very ends of the world. One good Roman went to England by the name of Augustine of Canterbury.

And he bore witness to Jesus Christ. And the Queen was converted. Queen Margaret was converted. So that's what happened there.

And then as a result of that, a few centuries later, a man named de Pontier was converted. And that man named de Pontier came to the remotest part of the whole world, Shaughnessy in Vancouver.

And there he bore witness to Jesus Christ by his life and ministry. And that's how this church got started, by people bearing witness to Jesus Christ. That's why Jesus says, you shall be my witnesses.

Now what the apostles did, you see, to bear witness is that they wrote the New Testament. Jesus said, I bear witness to the truth. To the apostles, he said, you bear witness to me.

[15 : 51] And to us, he says, you bear witness to the testimony to me, which is found in the apostolic witness to Jesus Christ, which is the New Testament. So that's what our work is.

We are to bear witness to Jesus Christ, whom we know through the apostolic witness to Jesus Christ, which is the New Testament. And so that what we are given as a church, the essential thing that we are given, is this apostolic witness to Jesus Christ, which is the Scripture, and the empowering of the Holy Spirit, that we, as we encounter Jesus Christ ourselves, can, from the center of our own lives, bear witness to Jesus Christ.

The two are locked together. You can't separate them. A lot of people get very heady about knowing the New Testament, but lack the empowering of the Holy Spirit.

A lot of people get spiritually turned on, but don't know the witness of the New Testament. And you get all sorts of problems in the church with those two kinds of people. What they have to do is, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to bear witness to the Jesus Christ whom we meet in the Scriptures.

Well, that's what Jesus said was to happen. And then it says that Jesus is lifted up, and a cloud receives him out of their sight.

[17 : 17] You see, that's... I love that passage, not because I understand it altogether, but because it says the thing. You see, there's a point at which our historic knowledge of Jesus Christ ends.

The cloud surrounds him, and we can no longer see him. We don't know what that cloud means, and what it hides from us. And I'm sure it hides it for our benefit, because we're not to speculate about it, or to think we understand everything that's on the other side of the cloud.

We know Jesus Christ up to the moment of his ascension, but then the cloud hides him, and he ascends into heaven. In the epistle of Peter, there is a statement about what follows that, and it's this, that he has gone into heaven, is at the right hand of power, with angels and authorities and powers subject to him.

That's where he has gone. We pray that we might one day hither ascend. That's where he's gone. And authority and power are given to him.

And the job of the church of Jesus Christ is to bear witness to him in the power which he gives them by the gift of the Holy Spirit. Well, the passage ends with two men in white, essential characters in the New Testament.

[18 : 54] The men in white are there to explain to Mary who this child is that's to be born to her. They're there to explain to the shepherds who this child is that has been born to her.

And the men in white are there on the Mount of Transfiguration to explain who this Jesus is to the disciples who are struck dumb with awe. Those men in white are there again at the resurrection to explain to the unbelieving disciples what has happened.

And these men are there again at the ascension to speak to the disciples and tell them where to go. And that's what they do at the end of this passage.

Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up into heaven? This Jesus who was taken from you into heaven will come in the same way that you saw him go into heaven.

The kingdom that you're looking for on earth will come when Jesus returns. In the meantime, you know what your job is.

[20 : 03] Get on with it. That's what he says to the disciples. What is their job? To bear witness to Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. That's what we're to do.

We don't know all the answers. We don't understand all the circumstances. We don't know the times or the seasons which the Father has in his knowledge but hasn't given it to us.

We don't know those things. But we do know what our task is and that is in the power of the Holy Spirit to bear witness to Jesus Christ.

And you see, when the church tries to do anything, it's usually... Oh no, I don't want to get cynical. The church very often appears to be impotent and powerless.

That's because the church takes on jobs that it's not qualified to do very often and issues that it's not qualified to get involved in. And in getting involved in it, they neglect the job that they were supposed to do.

[21 : 07] The essential job of bearing witness to Jesus Christ which is what they do know. They know him. And bearing that witness in the power of the Holy Spirit.

And so while we come to the climax of our restoration fundraising program today, you're invited to, all of you, to take at least some part in it.

The smallest part if you want, but do take some part in it. Because what we want to do is to be able as a community to do the work to which we're called, which is to bear witness to Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.

To do the job that Christ has left us to do. He bore witness, his apostles bore witness, and we bear witness to him. Amen.

Amen. Our authorial hymn number 6868. VSL 437, your lights are on.

[22 : 15] I... Amen. Amen. Net. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Praise the Lord.

Praise the Lord.

Praise the Lord.

Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord. Hallelujah. Praise the Lord.

[24 : 22] Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord. Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Praise the Lord.

Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Hallelujah.

Praise the Lord. Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Hallelujah.
Hallelujah. . . .

. . .

[26 : 00]

. . . We receive all we offer you this day, including the responses that we have made to the restoration and the renewal plan.

Let your spirit, that you have bestowed up to your church, inspire and empower us to call you your son, that we may continue his work in the world, through the fires of all who believe.

We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ the Lord. Amen. Let us pray together. God of love and peace, we raise our voices in praise to you today for your abundant provisions for us, for your gifts that are pressed down, shaken together and running over and are daily poured into our lives.

We are above all grateful for your forgiveness and your invitation to commune with you. We thank you for your blessings upon this church, reflected in its growth and the spirit of love that is made manifest here.

[27 : 36] We thank you for the clergy who are committed to God and to this congregation. We thank you for the continued growth of prayer and Bible study groups in this church.

And we ask that you would give them guidance and harmony. We thank you for helping us to meet the challenges in the past. And we pray for your continued assistance in the future.

Lead us in boldness and daring for your sake. As we look to the future, move on our hearts to offer our money, our time, our energy, and our gifts to fulfill the needs and the goals of this parish.

We pray for the visitation of your spirit as we all celebrate these very special anniversaries this month. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray together for those in our midst who mourn that they may be comforted. Bring light and life to all who sorrow or suffer.

[28 : 39] We think especially today of Christine, Ed, Bill, Harold, Peter, and Michael for healing and for your peace at this time.

As a congregation, we pray now together for the crisis in our own nation. Recognizing you as the author of peace and the lover of concord, we call upon you now to bring reconciliation to our own land.

We know that in the past, when the saints have cried out to you in faith, you have brought health to them. And now in our own anxiety, frustration, distress, and helplessness, we call upon you, asking you to redeem us by your grace.

May we discharge our responsibility as your children to be the light of the world. May we bring the fruits of love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control into all of our interactions with others.

We renounce hatred and revenge and ask for understanding and forgiveness. We pray for your healing for all of our wounds. We also uphold our leaders in prayer, requesting that they will demonstrate vision, courage, wisdom, and integrity in their deliberations.

[30 : 03] And may we continue to uphold them in prayers so that our country can show an example of honor and compassion. We'll keep silence just for a moment and then pray, and then go forward from here.

Thank you.