

"You Will Be My Witnesses"

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[0 : 00] Hi everyone, my name is Adrian Wong, and I'm one of the members of the staff team at this church. It's great that I can bring the word of God to you today.

And I'm also a regular user of Facebook, and I've seen some memes that try to capture this time in a lighthearted way. The best one that I have seen is the four stages of quarantine.

You might have that on screen with you. I love this one because it captures this moment perfectly. From the stresses of homeschooling or work, and the potential wage gain of being housebound. And I just really hope that for myself, that I won't come out as a more haggardly fatter version of myself at the end of this time. And we live in a time of drastic change.

In this section of the Bible, we can also see and meet a group of Jesus' followers who also went through a drastic change. Well, it's easy to bunk up and have a siege mentality during this time.

[1 : 08] Just look at all the ludicrous examples of hoarding. But today, I hope to challenge you to live differently, both for right now and also to aim for what we can be at the end of this time.

I'll pray to God now so that we can do this. Dear God, as you change the disciples through Jesus, through your word, pray that you can do a similar work in us.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. So please keep the Bible open up at Luke 24, so that we can read through this.

What we have here is a before and after picture. In verses 36 to 43, we have the before picture. The disciples were in a state of shock, even when Jesus appeared in bodily form.

Let's look at verse 37. They were described as startled and frightened. They thought that they saw a ghost. We can see that Jesus tried to show in different ways that he is real.

[2 : 18] In verse 40, he said, When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, Do you have anything to eat?

The disciples here still couldn't believe what they saw. So now that we have the before picture, let's look at the after. The after picture is in verses 50 to 53.

I'll read from verse 52. Then they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.

We must ask ourselves this question. How did they change from fear and confusion to worship and proclamation? To do this, we need to understand what caused the change.

The first thing that caused the change is the disciples realized what Jesus means from the Old Testament because Jesus showed them what he means. In verse 46, he told them, This is what is written.

[3 : 32] The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day. Jesus' death isn't just a cruel execution or an accidental death.

But as the Messiah, God's chosen servant, he willingly suffered so we can be forgiven. Jesus is also God's chosen king, rising on the third day to show that he can defeat the ultimate enemy, death.

Secondly, the disciples understood Jesus' work and its significance. In verse 47, it says, Repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name.

So here, preaching isn't about just what happened to Jesus, but what his actions has achieved. So, what does repentance and forgiveness in his name mean?

So let's look at the idea of repentance. Dictionary.com defines repentance in this way. Firstly, deep sorrow or contrition for a past sin, wrongdoing or the like.

[4 : 44] The second way is regret for any past action. Is this the kind of repentance that Jesus has in mind? We often function with this dictionary definition, but that wouldn't be what is described

here.

You see, if we function with that definition, it has nothing to do with Jesus. Repentance is not only about giving up your moral vices, but it's actually turning, turning away from those things to Jesus as the king.

In the same way, forgiveness in Jesus' name is not mainly about forgiving other people or seeking forgiveness from others or trying to forgive yourself to clear your conscience.

When we turn to Jesus, we realize that we need forgiveness and the only way we can do that is through the death of Jesus so that our wrongdoing can be paid for by Jesus.

So look at the task that Jesus gave to the disciples. We can see that in verse 47. And repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

[6 : 02] The idea we see here also appears in Luke, in Acts, which is a sequel to Luke. In chapter 1, verse 8, it says, The disciples carried out the instructions from Jesus from Luke 24, verse 47, in the book of Acts.

There are two paths to Jesus' instruction, which is to preach repentance and forgiveness, and who to preach it to, to all nations.

We can see the disciples proclaiming this message in the book of Acts. Let me read you some examples from the book of Acts. In Acts, chapter 2, verse 38, it says, Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.

Acts 10, verse 43, says, All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.

Acts 14, verse 15, says, We bring you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God. Acts 17, 30, In the past, God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.

[7 : 39] In Acts 26, I preach that they should repent and turn to God and demonstrate their repentance by their deeds. And in the sermons that I've quoted from, they also fulfilled the prayer to preach to all nations, with Peter preaching in Jerusalem in Acts 2, and at the end, near the end, Paul reaching Rome at the end of Acts.

So, let's look at the third thing. How are we to proclaim Jesus now? It's fairly obvious that none of us are old enough to see Jesus or have been taught by the disciples.

And we are not eyewitnesses like the disciples are. And although we won't proclaim Jesus in the same way, the brief to us is similar.

We are to proclaim Jesus to all nations. So, let me give you two practical ways for each part of the brief. Firstly, how do we reach the nations?

The first way that we can do that is to deepen our existing relationships. So, I'll give you an example from one of my friends. He, like me, we like playing board games, and we meet once every two or three months to do so.

[8 : 59] As a parent with young kids, I don't get to do this often, so that's all we can do, once every two or three months. He's also a Christian, and he really wanted to deepen his relationship with his high school friends that he hasn't met that much.

So, he organized to play board games and chat. He found that this way of playing, people were much more willing to meet. He has organized three of these meetings in the last month already. And he had time to delve into more one-to-one relationships after the games. The example of what he did is something that we can emulate. I'll just break it down into steps so we can sort of think about how we do that in our own context.

The first thing is, we need to encourage our existing physical communities to keep in touch in virtual communities. The second thing is once you form these communities, be an active participant and initiate conversations.

And when you're in these conversations, be genuine and caring. And work out how they are feeling and use it as a bridge to invite people to our online church or community groups.

[10 : 11] This season of fear and uncertainty means that people are more willing to open up. Somebody at church shared with me that he felt during the last month he has much deeper conversations.

He thinks that it would take years to achieve the same level of depth under the normal circumstances. The second way that we can reach nations, besides building deeper relationships, is to make new ones.

So for a lot of us, social distancing is quite tough already. But imagine doing this by yourself, as a student, or a worker on a working visa from overseas.

And they can't return home overseas because of travel restrictions. And they have no way of connecting with their family and friends. We have a great opportunity to connect with many people like this.

especially in the area of Chesford. In this local council area, just more than half, 50.6% of people, were born overseas.

[11 : 23] The nations have come to Chesford. And the nations need to know Jesus, especially in this time. So I'll show you some ways that people at this church have tried to take hold of this opportunity to connect with people during this time.

So some people, during their exercise walks, have been dropping notes to their neighbours, either the neighbours or the same people in the apartment complex, offering help, like picking up groceries, offering their number for a friendly chat, to establish goodwill.

And as a result, quite a few of them have gotten to know their neighbours a bit better. And others have tried to do this in quite creative ways. For example, they got the kids to play on the driveway instead of in the backyard, just to get more chances to bump into the neighbours.

I encourage you to think of creative ways that you can do this in your own context. For those that are watching the service online, and are meeting as a group, why don't you meet after the service and brainstorm ideas of how you can make more connections and make deeper connections as well.

So let's look at the second part of the brief, which is how to proclaim Jesus. So it's unlikely that many of us will stand in front of 3,000 people like Peter or more and proclaim Jesus.

[12 : 48] But let me suggest two ways that we can do this in our context. The first thing that we have already seen, that we have mentioned, is to invite people to our online communities, both the large ones like the live streaming that you are a part of right now, or the small ones in our community groups.

So I'll show you why that's important. In the past, the typical path for people to become a Christian is for them to figure out what the Bible means before joining a local church.

Nowadays, quite a few of us want to see and experience what things are like for believing. Putting it another way, in the past, a lot of people want to believe before they belong.

Now it's more likely the other way around. People want to belong before they believe. Now this statement doesn't only apply to those that grew up in the postmodern West, but it also applies for cultures that never heard of the good news of Jesus.

When these people see and hear and experience the good news of Jesus in action, they would want to work out what Jesus means for them in real life.

[14 : 03] I'll give you an example of this. A few years ago, I was talking to a grandpa from mainland China here on a one-year visa because he was here to look after his grandkids.

We went to the same church and as we were standing outside, he noticed how the kids were playing. He said to me, I can see that you guys are different.

The kids are taking care of each other and the parents were willing to help the kids and not just their own kids but other kids if they needed help. That was attractive to this grandpa so he decided to hang around this church community for a while.

Can you see that in this example when a community even as young as kids express their repentance turning away from living for themselves for caring for each other it gives us a living example of repentance and the opportunity to speak about the message of Jesus.

Even though we can't meet in person right now, we can invite people to online communities and there are some unexpected advantages for us to do this.

[15 : 18] Well, when people can live stream church at home, they don't have to worry about fitting in. They can do it from the comfort of their own home and it's not that far to, it's right here at home so it's not far for you to go to church.

And the best thing is people are opting into church. They can opt in as their own accord and watch this and work out what Jesus means for them. The thing is the way that we express community right now, whether we are warm and inviting, impacts the way we meet together when we do come back together.

So my first challenge for you is are you willing to invite people to community? An easy way for you to do that is just to post the live stream links every week for church on Sunday and work out how to do a personal invite for your community groups.

The second way that we can proclaim Jesus is to use our stories. When people see the experiences of our repentance and forgiveness, not just the facts of what Jesus did and not just how you were converted, but how you experience it every day is a concrete example for people to see.

So I'll give you a second challenge of how to do that. I'll film myself sharing a story of how I turned to Jesus and how it's impacted my life.

[16 : 50] And I would like to invite you to take up the same challenge. Record a video of yourself, tell others how the good news of Jesus has impacted you and posted on social media.

Remember, we can share both our successes and failures. When we are genuine, others can see that the impact of Jesus has on us. It's actually, especially in our failures, that people can see how repentance and forgiveness is about in action.

So as we come to a close, I would like to think of us to think of church in the form of a meme. So what would we be like at the end of social distancing?

Imagine a church that takes the task of reaching the nation seriously. Imagine a church where every regular member has built five deeper or new relationships with those in our community.

Imagine a church that takes proclamation seriously, that invites people to our church and community groups, and is ready to share the good news of Jesus in their stories of how Jesus has impacted them.

[18 : 01] Wouldn't that be a change worth aiming for? So what I would like to do now is for us to have 15 seconds to jot down what you want to change and James will lead us in prayer after this time.

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