

You will be My Witnesses

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 September 2024

Preacher: Paul Sampson (BCA)

[0 : 00] We've just had the Paris Olympics 2024. I wonder if anyone in this room went to the Sydney Olympics 2000. Raise your hand. Quite a few of you actually were there.

Keep your hand up if you actually saw Cathy Freeman win the 400. You were there to see that. I am so jealous. It was really quite difficult actually in days gone by, if I may speak as looking back, to witness something.

You had to kind of be there in person in order to witness it. But then with the advent of television of course and more recently with now, in fact we have a phone in our pockets that has a camera and a video camera in it and we've got the internet, it's almost impossible not to see something that happened because it gets filmed and goes up online.

Not much can happen these days without someone recording it. The emergence of this technology means that we have an enhanced capacity to be witnesses.

But really that's just one side of witnessing, being the observer, the one who sees an event. Acts 1 describes for us Jesus' instruction to his disciples, and we'll see it there in verse 8.

[1 : 28] I'll put it up on the screen there for you. It says, This is the other side of disciples simply witnessing an event.

They did that. But they are now not just to be the witnesses of, but to witness to others. Telling others of what they have seen and heard.

This morning I want us to see two things. Firstly, how the disciples were to be witnesses in both the observing and the telling of what they'd seen. And secondly, significantly, what it means for us to be witnesses today, here in Chatswood 2024.

Firstly though, let's have a look with you at what disciples are to be witnesses of. Luke wrote a big chunk of the New Testament. He wrote what we call Luke's Gospel, but then he wrote his volume 2, which is Acts.

And in fact, Luke's Gospel and the beginning of Acts kind of overlap. The events at the very end of Luke's Gospel and the events at the very beginning of Acts overlap. Jesus, we read, had suffered, he'd died, he'd been buried, and then he rose again from the grave.

[2 : 50] And then for about 40 days, there was a period before he was taken up into heaven. Luke 24 describes how after Jesus' resurrection, he met with various disciples.

He met with two disciples on the road to Emmaus, and then he asked them about the things they had witnessed. Jesus explained to them how he was the fulfillment of all the Old Testament scriptures.

Jesus then appeared in the very midst of the disciples. He showed them his hands and his feet. He even ate broiled fish with them. In other words, he proved that he was alive.

He had physically, bodily risen from the dead. We read then in the end of Luke's Gospel, and I'll put it up on the screen there where you can open your own Bibles. Luke 24 from verse 44, Jesus said to the disciples, This is what I told you while I was still with you.

Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the Psalms. In other words, everything must be fulfilled about me that is written in the whole of the Bible.

[3 : 59] And then he opened their minds so they could understand the scriptures. Jesus told them, This is what is written. The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

And then there's that word again, You are witnesses of these things, see what he told them. Notice the reminder here that the disciples, they are witnesses, and they are to be witnesses.

Then we read in Acts chapter 1, the very first verse we read just a moment ago, Luke writes, In my former book, Theophilus, that is, he's referring to Luke's gospel, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up into heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.

But don't you think that's a curious expression? It says, All that Jesus began to do and to teach until he is taken up into heaven. That implies that Jesus is going to continue to do and to teach after he's been taken up into heaven.

How can that be? Well, Acts 1 gives us the answer. In Acts chapter 1, verse 3, we are reminded that the risen Jesus presented himself to many people and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive.

[5 : 38] So for 40 days, Jesus appeared to people to confirm that he had physically, bodily, risen from the dead. They witnessed that. They saw that with their own eyes.

And they were in turn then to be witnesses of the things they had seen. Jesus then went on to speak about the what next. Not a kind of a five-year plan or a strategic plan or a governance plan. No, and not a modest plan either. But a plan that was entirely in accord with God's promises from the beginning of time. The Jesus plan is about the coming of the kingdom of God.

Now, here in Chatswood and all around the place on a couple of weeks' time, 14th September, the New South Wales local government elections will occur. And probably in your letterbox, like mine, you've been getting outlines of what candidates are promising to do if they are elected.

And they're quite often ambitious aims that these candidates are suggesting. Ambitious aims but for the local area.

[7 : 00] The Jesus plan is entirely different. It's on another level altogether. It doesn't just pertain to one part of one city in one period of time.

But the Jesus plan is for all people for all time in every part of the world. So, look again at verse 4 of chapter 1 of Acts.

Jesus, Luke reminds us rather that while Jesus was having a meal with his disciples, he outlined his plan. Notice, of course, it wasn't a suggestion.

It wasn't something he was putting out there to be kind of workshopped. No, this was a command. It was to be understood and obeyed.

Verse 4, Do not leave Jerusalem, said Jesus, but wait. And here I think we have in what at first blush looks like a very odd plan.

[8 : 03] In former days, I worked for a couple of large multinationals, including in the food industry. And when a food manufacturer, a global food manufacturer, finds a product that they believe is going to just go gangbusters across the whole world, then they work out a strategic plan in order to do a global rollout of this.

I was working for the Mars group at the time they were going to roll out the Mars ice cream bars around the world. Now, I cannot imagine for one moment the director of sales and marketing saying to his sales managers that, hey, we've got this fantastic product ready to go and here's what I want you to do.

Stay here in Chatswood and wait. You think, that doesn't make sense. Why would... And you see, but that's what Jesus' command was.

I want you to see the stark difference between the Jesus plan and the corporate world. Why would Jesus say to his disciples, wait, stay in Jerusalem?

Well, the answer is found in the second part of the verse. Jesus' disciples are called to trust in him and to wait for the gift that his father had promised, the gift of the Holy Spirit, the gift that heard him speak so much about.

[9 : 39] Do not leave Jerusalem, he says, but wait for the gifts my father promised. You see, if they were to charge off and try and fulfill the great commission without waiting for the Holy Spirit, then they'll be doing it in their own strength.

They'll be doing it in their own capacities, in their own power. That's not the Jesus plan. The Jesus plan is that they will be witnesses around the globe, but not in their own strength.

They'll be doing it in the power of the Holy Spirit. God's people are to obey his commands and not witness in their own strength, but to receive the power of the Holy Spirit and Jesus promised in verse 5, in a few days they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit.

That event, which we know as Pentecost, did happen just 10 days later. We read in Acts chapter 2 that at that time the apostles were enabled to do that, which is humanly speaking quite impossible. They had people from around the world gathered there and they were able to preach the gospel and be understood, each person understood it in their native language. Now I did a little bit of research during the week about Chatswood and the census data says that these are the top languages spoken at homes in Chatswood.

[10:53] English creeps in at number one, Mandarin, Cantonese, Korean, Japanese and Hindi. Now I'd be surprised if there weren't people in this room this morning who speak these languages.

Imagine if I was then preaching as I am in English and you were actually hearing it in Mandarin or Cantonese or Korean. That's what was happening at Pentecost.

That was the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised them that they would receive power when the Holy Spirit came. That word power, the Greek word is dynamon, dunamon, from which we get the English word dynamite.

We're talking about an extraordinary power that came upon them that they're able to do that. And it is in that extraordinary power that they are to proceed to be witnesses, Jesus' witnesses in Judea and Samaria and then to the ends of the earth.

in the early chapters of Acts, we see that the world was coming to Jerusalem. The model was an attractional one.

[12:05] People came to the city of David to Mount Zion. Jerusalem was a very attractive city to go to. Maybe not at the moment but I imagine, raise your hand if you've been to Jerusalem.

Anyone here in the room been to Jerusalem? It's a really interesting city. People came from around the world to Jerusalem.

And when they came, they heard the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit. Thousands of people heard the gospel in their own mother tongue and responded in repentance and faith.

And then those people returned to their places of origin. The Copernican revolution of global mission came a short while later.

We read in Acts chapter 7, so just a few chapters on, of Stephen speaks to the Sanhedrin. Now Stephen was asked to come and speak to the legal councils of the day, the heavies of the day.

[13:11] And he delivered what was an absolute cracker of a sermon. He drew on a lot of Old Testament references and showed how Jesus was the fulfillment of the promises of the Old Testament. It was an amazing sermon.

So at the end of that, they decided they would take Stephen on a road trip to all the biggest stadia and all the major synagogues all around the world so that more people could...

No, they didn't do that. Do you know what they did? They took him out after he delivered this incredible sermon and they stoned him. And again, we're kind of left scratching our head thinking, how can this be part of God's plan?

How can it be part of God's plan to take out a man who had the capacity, one of the few on the planet at that moment who had the capacity to preach the gospel clearly and faithfully and boldly and after he does so, he's stoned to death.

How can that be part of God's plan? Well, we actually see it in the next verse, the beginning of chapter 8, verse 1 and we read there on that day, the day when Stephen was stoned to death, a great persecution broke out and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.

[14:33] You see, in God's economy, the tragic martyrdom of Stephen led to the spread of the gospel across the known world.

The model of mission moved from being, if I remember my school of science correctly here, from being a centripetal one, that is the force of kind of coming in, to it becoming a centrifugal one, the force then the gospel going out, going out to take the gospel to the ends of the earth.

Now, over the centuries, the church has fallen into this era of operating as if our mission mandate is fulfilled if we simply build churches on hills and then expect people to come.

Building churches is important, but friends, our mission mandate is to go out, to be witnesses. witnesses. Did the first century disciples do that which they were commissioned to do? Yes, they did.

[15:41] How do I know that? Because we are sitting here in Chatswood, two millennia later, and Chatswood, beautiful place, but if I may say from a first century perspective, Jerusalem perspective

is the ends of the earth.

The gospel has come to the ends of the earth. Verse 8, Jesus said, they were to be witnesses in Jerusalem and all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

Let's consider our context here. In Sydney 2024, we do a pretty good job of being witnesses of Jesus in our Jerusalem, our Judea, that is, in the Sydney Diocese.

And we do a pretty good job of supporting ministries that go out from here to the ends of the earth.

So organizations like CMS are supporting ministries to the nations.

nations. But what about our Samaria? What about the 7 million people who live in regional, rural and remote parts of Australia?

[16:59] They're often forgotten. The BCA mission is entirely in accord with the Jesus mission. The BCA strategic plan is entirely in accord with Jesus strategic plan.

That is, to go the distance, to take the gospel, not just to the cities, not just to the nation, but to the original rural and remote parts, to all people.

To places like, and you can see them on the map there, Exmouth and Roxby Downs and Cobar, Cobar, and what I was speaking about before, in the western part of New South Wales, and Newman and Kununurra, right up there in the north, in the western Australia, north of western Australia.

I mentioned before that we have more than 10,000 prayer supporters in New South Wales, diligently upholding these ministries in prayer using the BCA prayer notes.

Now, last Thursday in the prayer notes, if you looked there, last Thursday, I remember the date, it was my wife's birthday, on the 29th, George and Carmel Ferguson are listed. Now, they're in Walgett and Colorado, and you read there, it's a little bit too small on the screen, but you can read it in your prayer notes later, that George and Carmel are committed to preaching the gospel and spreading the good news of salvation.

[18:20] We might add to the ends of the earth, or we could use the language of Acts, chapter 1, verse 8, to Samaria. They're out there in Walgett and Colorado, and I, trusting in the Holy Spirit, thousands of people across the country pray regularly to support the BCA mission.

Not because it's the BCA mission per se, because that mission aligns with the Jesus mission. So let me ask you this morning, will you please join us in this part of the mission, and pray and give to support the gospel going to our Samaria.

As disciples of Jesus, our mission and our plans need to continue to be aligned with Jesus' plan, to bring people across the globe under the sound of the gospel, so that people in the cities, people in the suburbs of Chatswood and beyond, people right across Australia and across the nations, come under the sound of the gospel.

That is our privilege, and that is our responsibility as witnesses of the gospel. So, here at St. Paul's, you must continue to strategize as to how to reach the many people of Chatswood who do not yet know Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

You must continue to strategize, but if I may say, not rely upon those strategies, but rather rely upon the power of the Holy Spirit that the Lord has promised to us before his ascension.

[20:04] salvation. We've seen how the first disciples were to be witnesses of the gospel, and what Jesus' command is for us to in turn be witnesses of the gospel.

We've seen the what. Let me finish this morning with the why. Why are we to press on to seek to bring all people under the sound of the gospel?

The compelling reason is found in the final verse of today's passage. After Jesus had given this command to witness to the world, he ascended to heaven, and then the angels gave those who were standing there this reminder.

This is the why. Jesus is coming back. Why do we keep going the distance to witness the gospel to all people?

Who is my friends? Jesus is coming back. Let's pray. Our gracious God and heavenly Father, we do thank you that in your love and mercy you sent your son, the Lord Jesus, to be born as a man, to live among us with all the struggles and temptations of life, but to live without sin.

[21:24] Thank you that Jesus so loved us that he willingly suffered and died to pay the price for our sins. God and thank you that just as predicted Jesus rose again from the grave and proved that he was alive.

Thank you that Jesus promised the gift of the Holy Spirit and we thank you that in your plan for the salvation of all mankind, you've chosen to include us.

Father, we praise you that we do not have to proceed in our own strength, but rather in the power of your Holy Spirit. As we seek to continue to take the good news of the gospel to the ends of the earth, to the remote places of Australia and here in Chatswood, give us courage and a deep trust in you and the power of your spirit.

We pray this in Jesus' name as we await his return. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.