

Sharing the Gospel as Good News (1)

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[0 : 00] I think that clock's fast, but I'm slow. Welcome, friends. Our topic this morning is the fountain pulse of witness bearing.

There's a bit of an outline there for you. The late and beloved Tim Keller, in his final public written words addressed to the state of the evangelical church in America.

Where are we? How did we get here? And where do we go from here? And among his seminal points, for me, most vivid and arresting was his diagnosis of a troubling malady.

A malady which alarmingly touches us at one of our vital organs as a people of God. The gravity of Tim's assessment was this.

We are sickest where we need to be most healthy. Well, what was this vital organ so afflicted?

[1 : 10] In Tim's mind, it was our ability graciously to engage unbelievers around us with the gospel. Well, I've become persuaded that Tim's diagnosis is on the mark.

And if it's so, what more burning topic to take up than this? So with this sense of supreme saliency, let's take it up together, team.

So how do we hope to do so in these next four weeks, should you come along for the journey?

Well, here's a map of where we're headed. Today, we'll begin by asking, how does witness bearing fit into our Christian life?

What place does it have? And what calls it forth and sustains it? Our witness, that is. Next, we'll ask the fundamental question.

So in the next session, Lord willing, what is the message we bear? And there we'll explore what we mean by calling the gospel good news. What is the significance of it being news?

[2 : 14] And what's so good about it anyway? Then on the third session, we'll identify some of the common barriers and obstacles to our witness bearing and explore how we might overcome them.

And then with resolute determination, my wife Anita always helps me on this. We want to be really practical. And we will follow up with a kind of a top 10 helps for sharing our faith.

And finally conclude with some suggestions as the first steps as to how to get started. So that's our excursion prospectus. So let's begin our tour by turning to our divine guide and beseech his traveling mercies.

Father, we do crave your blessing presence with us in this endeavor as we're together. Spirit, take these things of Christ and give them to us, just as Christ promised you would do, that we might both will and do your good pleasure.

And we want you, Christ, to be exalted in our lives together as your people of God, such that when Christ is exalted, you have said you will call many to yourself. So do it, Lord.

[3 : 24] We ask for your glory. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. All right. So let's turn to the question, how does witness bearing fit in to our Christian life?

What are its fountainheads and its energies? And I want to propose five fueling dynamics of our witness bearing.

And here they are. It flows from the commission of our King. It reflects an attunement to the great drama.

It's impelled by love of neighbor. It's central to our praise of the Savior. And it arises out of a spirit. And it arises out of a spurring of the Spirit.

So first, the commission of our King. Our witness. Well, what commission is that? Well, it's been called the Great Commission.

[4 : 25] And it's recorded by each of the gospel writers. Every single one of them. The Matthew account is probably most familiar. Where Matthew writes, recording Jesus' saying, All authority on heaven and earth has been given to me.

Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all the things that I have commanded you.

And behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Matthew 28, 18. Go. Actually, it might be better rendered going or as you go.

And that's to say, as we go about, wherever it is that it takes us, always and everywhere, let gospel witness accompany our goings.

And we quickly get the impression that it's far deeper than a task. As great as the task is, it might even be regarded in some sense as an identity.

[5 : 36] Think of yourselves as ambassadors. The term is Paul's from 2 Corinthians 5. You are always and everywhere representing me to the world.

Ever being my embassy, calling a world to be reconciled. I can pull back. We can put some chairs up in front if we need to. That's fine.

My commission is that you be the one through whom I make my appeal to a lost and a dying world. As it says in 2 Corinthians 5, where we drew that term ambassador. 2 Corinthians 5, 18 through 20. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

That is, in Christ, God is reconciling the world to himself. And he is making his appeal through us. Therefore, we are ambassadors.

[6 : 51] We implore on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. Now, some have suggested, yeah, yeah, that's only the apostle.

That's what he was supposed to do. He's really only talking about himself. You know, the we and the us, that's the royal we and the royal us. That's what's going on there. But this is a grievous mistake because it's impossible.

As clearly, this is God's plan for reconciling not a little portion of the Mediterranean around the first century, which Paul might have managed to do on himself, you know, because as remarkable as a fellow he is.

No, no, but this is God's strategy for reconciling what? Non-rhetorical. The whole world, yeah. The whole world. The whole world. So, you know, that's something that it's going to take a whole village, the whole people of God to pull off, not just one apostle.

So, it's going to involve more than that, as impressive as Paul is. And as to verse 20, I don't know, people don't, well, if you have your Bible open, verse 20, and you happen to have a pencil, cross out the U, cross out the U, cross out the U in verse 20.

[8 : 06] It's not there in the Greek. You see, Paul is not making an appeal to the Corinthians. Be reconciled. You know, I beseech you, you should be reconciled to Christ. No, they already were reconciled.

They were believers. What he is doing is explaining what we, as reconciled believers, do. We all implore, be reconciled to Christ.

He's just given us our job description. So, our witness bearing flows from our marching orders. We are under the King's commission. With all authority on heaven and earth, he sends us on this errand.

He appoints us as ambassadors. And this is quite an authorization. Now, think of Christ's words to us as his disciples for a moment as an authorization.

An authorization. An authorization. All authority is given to me. And it's wonderful to know of your authorization. When you feel your presence or activity may be exposed to some challenge.

[9 : 17] What are you doing here? You've no right. This is not called for. This is unwanted. This is an offense. I remember when I was a graduate student in Cambridge.

The colleges would have a number of gardens. Lovely gardens. But they were stratified. And you could only use certain ones if you had certain authorization. Each required its own authorization to set foot in.

And whenever I'd go into certain gardens. Say that might have been gardens of another one of the colleges. There was always this low-grade anxiety. That somehow my authorization would be challenged.

There was a palpable difference in my cadence when I was in my own college garden. Knowing my indisputable authorization to be there.

So brothers and sisters, if ever there were an indisputable and all-conquering authorization, surely it is this one given to us by the King of Kings and the Heir of all things.

[10:26] So may that put a confidence in our step wherever we go, wherever we happen to be. As the Lord said to Gideon, Judges 6.14, Go in this your strength.

Have I not commanded you? Have I not sent you? So our witness flows from the commission of the King. But also our witness reflects an attunement to the great drama.

You see, all of us find meaning in the story that our lives are a part of. And no human being can live without implotment.

And for the Christian disciple, that governing plot is supplied by the great drama of redemption. It just pulses progressively through the whole of Scripture.

And one place where the drama and its implication for our lives surfaces vividly is from the pen of the Apostle in his letter to the 1 Corinthians.

[11:36] Again, if you have your Bibles, take a look if you'd like. 1 Corinthians 7, 29 through 31. And the context of this instruction is Paul's answering some questions about marriage and singleness.

But we won't look into those. But I want us to catch the framework as to how he answers this question. So the framework. This is what he writes.

Pick it up in 29. This is what I mean, brothers and sisters. The appointed time has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none.

And those who mourn as if they were not mourning. And those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing. And those who buy as though they had no goods.

And those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.

[12:40] Notice that for Paul, something has happened which radically alters the way we are in the world as believers.

This event absolutely conditions the way we now live. We might be married. But because of this event, we don't simply settle into our domestic routines.

Yes, like others, we weep and we rejoice. But not as if those emotional highs and lows were somehow decisive.

Now, our engagement with the world cannot be our engrossment with it.

Why not? What is this all conditioning reality? Well, the key to understanding why not is the Apostle's phrase, The time has been shortened.

[13:48] Verse 29. The word for time there is not *chronos*, just kind of chronological duration, one moment after another. But rather the word *kairos*.

That is the specific quality of a particular period of time. A critical moment in which much is at stake. A time of opportunity that will not last indefinitely. What is the great event that has charged time, which injects drama into this drama?

And what are the great events that have become bookends that bound our time and animate it, energize it, electrify it? Well, those events are the coming of Christ and his coming again.

There is cross and resurrection and with them a call for all everywhere to repent and believe and his imminent return as judge of all.

[15:01] That's what bounds time. And notice that the Apostle also supplies the ground for this radical living. For the present form of this world is passing away.

Verse 31. What does he mean by the present form of this world? Well, not the created order itself, but rather the created order in rebellion.

The world that has judged Jesus on the cross by nailing him to it. But of course, the world's judgment of Christ was its own self-judgment.

The judgment of the cross means that this present world order is passing away. So, in light of this saving act of God in Jesus and his imminent return as judge, and in light of the verdict that lies over this present world, to live a life utterly absorbed in other things is to be completely out of touch with the grand drama that we live in.

Out of touch with the nature of this limited critical moment and the fleeting *kairos* opportunity for bearing witness to the saving event of Christ and a calling of a world passing away under judgment to align itself to God's saving Messiah, Christ.

[16:49] So, what does it mean for us to be attuned to the grand drama? Well, it means that the chemist cannot be exclusively consumed with her experiments, nor the artist be forever absorbed with her canvases, nor the geologist with her rocks, nor the historian with manuscripts, Kevin, nor the philosopher with their puzzles, for such would be utterly out of touch with the supreme fact that we are caught up in a grand drama.

And so, the Christian baker cannot simply coax out the treasure of wheat, rye, barley, and yeast, but will also herald the news that Jesus is the bread of life.

Neither may the Christian electrician simply install light bulbs, though she will attempt to do them well, she will also testify to the light of the world, Christ.

Nor must the Christian cobbler merely make shoes, make them well as he will. His feet must be shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.

Anything less would be to be completely out of step with the drama that we inhabit. And what of our witness-bearing role in the drama?

[18:28] I mean, should we think of it as an insignificant role, really? Or is it a leading role in the drama? Well, let's think in terms of the unfolding drama of witness to Christ and our place in that story.

Let's think of some of the protagonists together. Who are some of the great witness-bearers to Christ the Messiah? Well, there was Moses, who testified of one who would come after him and speak God's words to the people.

In Deuteronomy 18, 15. There's the prophet Micah in 5.2, indicating where the Christ, the coming Christ, would be born.

It was that prophecy that led the wise men to Bethlehem. The star just got him to the general region. It was actually the scriptures that lead you. Isaiah spoke of him as a suffering, sin-bearing servant, Isaiah 53.

These and many other Old Testament prophets bore witness to the Christ who would come. And the final, the final Old Testament prophet, John the Baptist, Jesus identified, this is Matthew 11, verse 11, Jesus identified as the greatest of all the prophets.

[19:49] Greatest in the sense of his witness to Christ. You see, all the other former prophets had a witness that was connotative.

The Christ that comes will be like this, and like this, and like this, and this will be true of him. It was all connotative. But John's witness was denitavative.

This is he. This is he. Compared to all of his forebearers, John's witness was the clearest, and thus the greatest.

But remarkably, does anybody remember what Jesus goes on to say after that? Remember? Remember? He says, John the Baptist, the greatest of all of the prophets, but the least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.

What? The least in the kingdom of God? The least of us, New Testament saints, greater than John the Baptist? In what sense?

[21:04] In what sense? In what sense could we be greater than John the Baptist? Well, in the same sense in which John the Baptist was greater than all the other prophets? In terms of the articulateness of his witness to Christ.

And Jesus is telling us that the least of us, New Testament saints, because of where we are in the unfolding drama, and what we know about Christ in his great salvation, we can give witness to Christ more articulate than John the Baptist, and all of the preceding prophets.

Oh, friends, does this not give us strong encouragement to bear our witness? May our attunement to the great drama energize us in our testimony to Christ.

Let's live in that drama. Let it deep die our consciousness and shape our imaginaries. And there will be a natural and inevitable flow of witness as it does.

So, attunement to the great drama, from that flows our witness. But also, our witness is impelled by our love of neighbor.

[22:36] Impelled by our love of neighbor. Friends, we follow a master who is full of compassion and love for the lost. Matthew records in 9.37, When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

And this description of spiritual destitution of the lost is cast in such vivid language. The word rendered here in our translation, harassed, originally meant flayed, mangled, and came to indicate

vexed with weariness and sorrow and worry.

In B.B. Warfield's classic work, *The Emotional Life of Our Lord*, much of the discussion of that long essay is devoted to Jesus' remarkable compassion and love for the lost.

To his disciples, after the encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well, he urges, Look up, I tell you. Lift up your eyes and see that the fields are white for the harvest.

John 4.35, So often I confess that I see, or I think I see, not the whiteness of readiness for harvest, rather the darkness of hardness of heart, the opposition of devotion to sin in my neighbors, rather than the oppression of the devastation of sin.

[24 : 20] You see the difference? What is my impulsive heart response to my lost neighbors? What catches my eye and holds my gaze?

One of our daughters, I won't name which one, when young, would sit on our stairs, concealed there, and listen to the conversations that we would have in our living room with those who were present.

And when the guests left, she'd finally come down, and then she'd go around just from memory by the different voices and characterize each speaker that she had overheard. And quite insightfully and incisively, but often very critically.

Whoa, whoa, whoa. Whoa, daughter. She was very young. Whoa, daughter. What is fundamentally true about each one of our guests who are here with us tonight?

They're sinners, Daddy. More fundamental. More fundamental than that. All right, Dad. They're in the image of God. Yes, daughter.

[25 : 29] Dearest daughter. Make it your practice when you encounter a son of Adam or a daughter of Eve to spend the first ten minutes discovering and delighting in how they reflect the image of God.

It will make your encounters much more fruitful and your life much more joyful if you do so. I'm struck by a phrase in Mark's account of Jesus' encounter with a rich young ruler.

Do you remember it? Mark 10, 21, Mark says, Jesus, looking at him, loved him. He saw something lovely in him and his heart went out to him.

Brothers and sisters, I fear that sometimes this is not us at our best. We have not lately been known for love when it comes to the unbelievers around us.

I remember asking some of my unbelieving new friends at the gym, hey, if you could ask evangelical Christians anything you would want to ask, what would you want to ask them if you had a question for them?

[26 : 57] And one of them immediately responded, I'd ask them, why do you hate us so much? Why do you hate us so much? Isn't that sad? I recently asked a sauna full of unbelievers, hey, if you could take all of your experiences, all your encounters with Christians, kind of squeeze into a Rorschach ink blotch, and then just freely associate, what would you see?

Come on, tell me, what would you see? You know, I can't even repeat it. It was so unflattering.

Now, this is not everybody, and I know there are just luminous, luminous exceptions of this.

Just this morning, I was praying that my widowed mother, who was running into some hard times, would find a way to church, it would be a new church, and someone would befriend her. And when I called her, she was at someone's house from the church who had invited her to lunch, and they were sitting down for a nice roast beef Sunday dinner.

So, oh, people of God, you do it so well. You do it so well. But let's try to abound still more in this area.

What if, instead, we were to gain the reputation for having a keen eye for the virtues of others around us, and a readiness to affirm them?

[28 : 24] What if we became known for speaking over our neighbors their love-worthy qualities, and sincerely and routinely complimenting them whenever we can?

Shall we despise them for their waywardness and sinfulness? Wait, but doesn't our understanding of grace forbid looking down on any sinner?

For what causes us to differ from anyone else, presses the apostle. And what do you have? What do we have that we have not received?

1 Corinthians 4.7. Or 1 Corinthians 15. Paul says, By the grace of God, I am what I am. John Newton, in his memoirs, impresses this same point with a vivid illustration.

He writes this. Speaking of our relation to unbelievers, those who believe the doctrines of sovereign grace act inconsistently with their own principles when they are angry at the defects of others.

[29 : 38] A company of travelers fall into a pit. One of them gets a passerby to draw him out. Now, he would not be angry with the rest for falling in, nor because they are not yet out, as he is.

He didn't pull himself out. Instead, therefore, of approaching them, he should show them pity. In the same way, Newton continues, a truly saved one will no more despise others than blind Bartimaeus, after his own eyes were opened, would take a stick and beat every blind man he met.

Yeah, it's true. But, we might object, this is not Newton anymore. We might object, yeah, but these unbelievers live immoral and misdirected lives, which deserve God's judgment.

Yes, God's judgment, not ours. We're not to judge outsiders. And would ourselves only deserve God's judgment as outsiders to Christ?

As the apostle writes to the Corinthians, in 1 Corinthians 5, 12, for what do I have to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom we are to judge?

[31 : 02] God judges those outside. So, how do we engage our unbelieving neighbors? I love to generate an image from Psalm 126, verse 6.

We go about them weeping, bearing our seed for sowing. We sow the seed of our witness, and we water that seed with our tears of compassion and love, in the hope, indeed confidence, that the powerful work of the Spirit shall one, as a result of that, we shall one day come home with shouts of joy, surrounded by the sheaves of a great harvest that the great Lord of the harvest has wrought among us.

So, we, our witness flows from love of our neighbor. our witness is also a central aspect, four, of our praise of our Savior.

Our praise of our Savior. As Peter wrote, mightily encouraging the exiled believers, you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who has called you out of darkness and into his marvelous light. First Peter 2.9. We are to proclaim the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness and into his marvelous light. Isn't that interesting?

[32 : 48] Why, that seems like a simultaneous description of gospel witness proclaiming him and praise his excellencies.

Hard to pull him apart there. And, that's no surprise, for we rightly think of our declaration of Christ as Savior, that is, witness bearing, as a species or a family member of praise.

It's praise. It exalts Christ. It holds him forth by holding him up. And, is this not the natural, one might say even irrepressible, bubbling up of testimony?

And, if you feel the Lord has done great things for us and we are filled with joy, it's hard not to express that joy in praise. And, this is, this sort of natural, irrepressible, bubbling up of testimony. Why did I say that? Think of, think of having just been delivered from the bondage of Egypt through a Red Sea escape. Isn't it kind of instinctive that like Miriam, we just look around and grab the timbrel and then take up the dance and take up a song?

[34 : 18] It just, just seems natural to do this. And, witness bearing, it's the bubbling up of the fizz of wonder and joy at God's salvation.

Here's how Spurgeon expressed it. When the Lord first pardoned my sin, I was so joyous, I could scarce refrain from dancing.

I thought on my road home from the house where I had been set at liberty that I must tell the stones in the street the story of my deliverance.

So full was my soul of joy that I wanted to tell every snowflake that was falling from heaven of the wondrous love of Jesus who had blotted out the sins of one of the chief of rebels.

This is from his morning and evening February 1st. Praise and with it witness bearing is inner joy made audible.

[35 : 26] Inner joy made audible. And my aim here is not to make anyone among us feel bad if we don't have much of this, many bubbles if you will.

Rather it's just to point out the bubbling spring. And some of us, I know I do often, I just go around dehydrated and I need to drink deeply from God's saving grace in my life.

So let's carry around the picture of our beloved in the locket of our memories and often open it up to gaze upon him.

I have someone's picture on my cell phone and when I see that picture my heart leaps and it's hard not to muse about her which puts me in a frame to want to speak about her. And when I do what comes across is that it's really easy to like her and it's hard not to love her. [36 : 40] And in this respect praise and its family member witness bearing is not just natural but it's self- energizing and self- accentuating.

It just gets richer and deeper the more we give it vent. What C.S. Lewis writes of praise is also true of witness bearing.

Again, same species. It augments our delight in Christ. It helps to compound and even complete it. Lewis writes, and this is from his reflections on the Psalms, I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment.

It is its appointed consummation. It's not out of compliment that lovers keep telling one another how beautiful they are. The delight is incomplete till it is expressed.

[37 : 50] It's frustrating to have discovered a new author, Lewis writes, and not to be able to tell anyone how good he is. To come suddenly at the turn of a road upon some mountain valley of unexpected grandeur and then to have to keep silent because the people with you care for it no more than for a tin can in the ditch.

To hear a good joke and to find no one to share it with. Michael Green in his classic work Evangelism in the early church speaks of the first Christians gossiping the gospel.

What a great phrase. Gossiping the gospel. The gospel just bubbled up everywhere for their witness bearing was a form of praise.

The wonder and joy of their Savior just ever vesting. Ever vesting. What they were doing was just simply praising God in public.

That was their witness. So our witness flows from praise of the Savior. And finally our witness bearing arises out of a stirring or a spurring of the Spirit.

[39 : 08] A spurring of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit's a missionary. A missionary comes from the Latin missio to send. The Spirit was sent among other things to send us out on our mission.

And this is clear from the opening of Acts where Jesus tells his disciples Acts 1-8 you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses.

Now notice that link between the Spirit's empowering and witness bearing. And this pledge of the empowering witness energizing Spirit was made good at Pentecost.

In explanation of that event Peter references the prophecy of Joel back from Joel 2 this is in Acts 2 17-18 where he explains this is Peter kind of quoting Joel's prophecy he says and in the last days it shall be God declares that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh and your sons and daughters shall prophesy and your young men shall see visions and your old men shall dream dreams even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my spirit and they all shall prophesy so Peter recognized Pentecost the beginning of the church our age as the beginning of the fulfillment of this vision and this helps us in our grasp of Peter's understanding of how

God's spirit animated new covenant people would prophesy and Peter clearly thinks that this prophesying is important as he doubles the single reference in Joel and Joel's text prophesying only comes up once when he quotes it he doubles it what did Peter take prophesying to mean Peter's citation of Joel stresses you noted that the activity of the spirit is on all of God's people sons and daughters young and old even servants implying not simply for the special everybody in these last days all God's people will have his Holy Spirit and all shall prophesy now if we understand prophecy here as simply foretelling some sort of future event as it is commonly taken the obstacle to understanding it that way is that in Acts that goes on being a witness to what was fulfilled in Joel's prophecy in Acts there are only a few occasions where people are actually foretelling things four to be specific 11 27 13 1 15 32 21 10 you can just read the whole book no

[42 : 22] Peter means by prophesying not exclusively or not primarily foretelling but rather forth telling of the wonderful news of God's saving action in Christ he's speaking here about witness bearing and the outpoured spirit enables each and every disciple powerfully to bear such witness solid ground here solid ground exegetically what does that look like well the whole book of Acts gives us a picture but we'll just take one glimpse of one little instance and only that partially Philip in his connecting with the Ethiopian in Acts chapter 8 if you turn up there if you have it Acts chapter 8 I'll pick up in verse 26 we won't read the whole thing we don't have time but I commend it to you

Acts 8:26 now an angel of the Lord said to Philip rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza this is a desert place and incidentally the angel of the Lord here is subsequently identified as the Holy Spirit in verse 29 it's clear that that's what he means angel messenger of the Lord so notice the Holy Spirit's direct prompting initiative with Philip the life of a witness bearer is one open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit I wonder if you've ever experienced such promptings do you recognize them as the Lord's messengers and such promptings need not be communicated in an audible voice external perhaps they just present themselves as a distinct inward sense that we identify as divinely given how do we do with these promptings well Luke tells us of Philip verse 27

Spirit prompted him and he rose and he went it's actually quite astonishing we don't have time to look at it now but to actually respond and to go he had to overcome all kinds of implausibilities whoa whoa whoa that's like that's like a desert road why would I expect to see anyone there it goes for a long way it goes 80 miles all the way to Gaza I mean that's kind of that's that's kind open-ended oh and by the way you know it's toward the south it could also be translated noon could be rendered noon that is the least the hottest time of the day nobody traveled at noon in the desert you die so it's an implausible time it's an implausible place all kinds of and where would he have been called from he was in the middle of a massive evangelistic crusade in Samaria baptizing hundreds and hundreds and hundreds what he's going to leave that to respond to this prompting so all these things that he had to overcome but we notice how does he respond verse 27 he rose and went he rose and went and subsequent in the narrative the spirit prompts

Philip again it says in verse 29 and the spirit said to Philip go he says so Philip ran don't you like that what a wonderful picture of the disciples alacrity the Lord says go and you just you run so let's expect the spirit's promptings here's a good prayer to pray as we enter society whether the cafeteria the gym or the shuttle bus what if we were to pray holy spirit I'm available I will be listening to your promptings guide me and grant me occasion to bear witness to your saving works about Jesus so the spirit prompts our witness what a blessed experience and there's a further work of the spirit in operation in our witness bearing not only does the spirit prompt us he also prepares the hearer not only is the spirit behind the go he's also behind the behold in the text did you catch that text where okay

I'll go down to the middle of the desert he says it goes in the middle of the desert in the middle of the day and behold there's somebody here as if who would have fought that who could imagine that the spirit is behind the behold also the extraordinary providence of a ready hearer appearing in the desert whose heart was receptive that's the spirit's orchestration as Luke tells us of Lydia in Acts 16 the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things that Paul said to her is this not wonderful encouragement that the spirit not only goes with us prompting us and empowering our witness but he also goes before us in front of us bringing to us God's elect who will respond in faith as many as are chosen as

[48 : 20] Luke writes of Paul's witness in Antioch Acts 13:48 and when the Gentiles heard this this was the gospel announcement they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed God has a great harvest that the Holy Spirit is ripening and readying for us to gather in and even when our hearers don't immediately seem very ripe or ready the Spirit is still pursuing the harvest he's pursuing the harvest and as the Lord said to Paul in the tough and gritty town of Corinth we might say the Las Vegas of its day Acts 18:9 and 10 so Paul do not be afraid but go on speaking and do not be silent for I am with you and no one will attack you to harm you for

I have many in this city who I have chosen to be my people brothers and sisters as witness bearers together we are on an adventure that assuredly will bear fruit for the Father has given to the Son a number that no one can count from every tongue tribe and nation who the Spirit is drawing and we by bearing our gospel witness just sowing our seed simply tossing out the seed maybe almost even mechanically the soil that he has prepared will be able to show life we render visible with our witness the secret inner drawing work of the Spirit what a privilege what a joy so as we go wherever we go let us be responsive to the

Spirit's promptings and attentive to the Spirit's providences perhaps an application might be the regular prayer Holy Spirit you were sent to send here am I send me open my eyes to your promptings and open sorry open my ears to your promptings and open my eyes to your providences shall we not pray that together and see how God delights to answer it wouldn't that be

exciting one final thing to note Luke concludes the episode but Philip found himself in Azotus and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea that's verse 40 interesting no mention is here made of any special promptings of the Holy Spirit in regard to Philip's witness he seems just as happily willing to proceed simply on the strength of the king's commission you shall be my witnesses preaching the gospel as he passed through all perhaps there's even a suggestion of a systematic approach to witness in the words in all the towns as if he flipped out his little map and figured out how he would catch all of them certainly the personal prompting of the

Holy Spirit is a great blessing in our witness spirit but no need to remain quietistically inert apart from such a prompting go down into the desert no and neither should we think that pulling out a map and making a strategy or a plan should be contrasted with the work that the spirit impels and sustains no both the king's commission and the spirit spurring impel us let let stop there I haven't left too much time but yes if there are any questions or comments I would love to entertain them for probably no more than five minutes alas but I'll do better next time I'll work on that don't hold me to it that might be a rash vow but I will try yeah questions yeah well yes the

Bible when the Bible uses judgment it uses judgment in a couple of different ways and sometimes if we're not careful about that it can be confusing so one of them is a sense of being judged or under judgment or under condemnation and it is true that outside of Christ we are all under condemnation for our sin and the only shelter from the storm of just judgment is in Christ but there's also sometimes the scripture does use a word that we render judgment in terms of an evaluation and you can see how they be connected and it is true that believers are evaluated for their life but not to see if they've done well enough to secure God's favor but rather as evidential support that they have been truly in a fruitful union with

[54 : 08] Christ and every union with Christ is fruitful so there will inevitably be a fruitfulness of life that then you can point to and it could say ah this person is in Christ look at the fruit of this look at the love joy peace patience so they are evaluated to affirm the reality the visible reality that they are in union with Christ and it is that union with Christ that keeps us from being condemned because as well as we might do in our fruit bearing we still have not loved God without our heart soul mind and strength our neighbor as ourselves who Christ alone has done which is what's required I I think that's so if we remember that you know what causes me to differ from someone else I'm just

I am a sinner just as all but for the grace of God there go I absolutely I think that that is a healthy truth to remember a spiritual truth to remember yes yep okay last one go ahead yeah sure I believe what you outlined here is a description of our general commission would you have another talk prepared for discerning your specific commission well that is we'll talk a little bit about that I think when we ask how do I begin where do I start because we'll spend some on talking about what is the gospel so that's the content of the message but then another really important thing is you gesture at is what is the context for me having a chance to share some of the content and that's going to be probably pretty peculiar and personalized to each person what is the context in which I might have most natural and fruitful potentially fruitful opportunity so absolutely we will touch on some of that yes a team I think we best probably break please safely haste to to to worship don't trip on the stairs but I I don't want to sink my reputation even further thank you and Lord willing we'll see you next week I