

We've been in this teaching series called Making a Move, which is focused on the call we all have to minister. God's given spiritual gifts to each of us to use both inside and outside the walls of the church.

One of the gifts he gives is evangelism. The word evangelism comes from a Greek word meaning "to proclaim the good news." An evangelist has a particular gift in telling others the good news about Jesus Christ. The good news is that Jesus came as the promised Messiah, lived a perfect life, suffered and died on the cross for our sins, rose again on the third day, and will come again to establish the new heavens and new earth. That is the Gospel, and evangelism consists of telling others this wonderful and true story with the purpose of bringing them to faith.

But that raises a question. If evangelism is a spiritual gift, and I don't have that gift, does that mean I never engage in evangelism? The answer is no. Just like not all of us have the gift of service or showing mercy, but we still need to serve and show mercy. We still need to engage in evangelism. It may not be our primary ministry, but it's part of our DNA as believers to want others to hear and embrace this good news. Listen to what the apostle Peter says to all of us: *"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15).*

Maybe a better word for what we're all called to is witness. I'm not talking about witnessing, but rather about being a witness. Most Christians I know kind of cringe when they hear the word witnessing, but the idea of being a witness isn't so daunting. In fact, that's one of the last things Jesus said before He ascended to heaven. In Acts 1, Luke tells us what happened as Jesus met with his apostles for the last time.

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 forty 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 me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you 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 is 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; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Acts 1:3-8

Notice the words: "You will be my witnesses..." He doesn't say you'll go out witnessing, but rather you will be a witness. It's not so much something you do, but rather something you are. As a follower of Jesus Christ, you're called to be His witness. And if we take a close look at what Jesus says here, he actually tells us what we need to be His witnesses.

We need to know He is alive

The first thing Jesus did during the 40 days after his resurrection proved to his apostles; he was really alive. *Luke says, "he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive." This was one of the qualifications for being an apostle—you had to be an eyewitness of his resurrection (1:22).* And it's clear by what Luke says they had to be convinced of it against their better judgment. The apostles didn't come to this conviction easily. They had seen his body taken off the cross and then placed in the tomb like a wet piece of spaghetti. Three days later, he appeared to them, and at first, they didn't believe it. But over time, they touched him; they saw him eat; they heard him speak. This wasn't a ghost. These weren't hallucinations. He convinced them that he was alive.

And today, we believe he's alive based on their testimony. That's part of what we bear witness to — he's alive! We've experienced him. If we don't believe Jesus rose from the dead and is alive today, just as the apostles said, we can't be witnesses. You might want to ask yourself, do I really believe this? I say I believe it. But do I live and act as if he's really alive? Even as we suffer through this COVID-19 crises, do we live in fear, or do we live with the confidence that he's alive; he's in control; and that he conquered death and the grave?

We need the Holy Spirit

The second thing Jesus did during these 40 days was promise the Holy Spirit. Luke says he gathered them together, perhaps at a meal, and told them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised and what they'd also heard about from him. Then he reminds them of something John the Baptist said, *"For John baptized with water, but in a few days, you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."* And then in verse 8, he says, *"But you will*

receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses..."

Our God is a Triune God. He's always existed as one God in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was there at creation. We see him at work in the Old Testament, resting on prophets and Kings. Then the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus at his baptism. Jesus did what he did in the power of the Spirit. Now Jesus said the Holy Spirit would come on them, and it will be a kind of baptism. The word baptism means to be immersed, drenched, submerged in water. So Jesus says to wait for the drenching with the Holy Spirit.

This actually took place a few days later at what we call Pentecost, recorded in Acts 2. There in Jerusalem, the Spirit dramatically fell on the first believers. But it didn't stop there. Throughout the book of Acts, we see how the Spirit fell on those who put their faith in Christ. Today a person is baptized in the Holy Spirit when they trust in Jesus. In 1 Cor. 12:13, Paul says, *"For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit."*

It's no mistake in the book of Acts that the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of Jesus (16:7). This is the way Jesus is at work today in us and through us, through the Holy Spirit. It's through the Spirit that Jesus continues to do and teach in the world. It's through the Spirit that you and I have a real, living relationship with Jesus. And it's through the Spirit that we're empowered to be his witnesses.

We need to embrace our calling to be His witnesses

Now the Jewish people had always associated the coming of the Holy Spirit with the end of the age when God would usher in his kingdom. That's why in verse 6, they ask, *"Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"* They assume this would be a political kingdom. The mention of Israel shows they assume this would be a kingdom only to do with Israel. And the words "at this time" shows they assume the kingdom would be immediately established.

Jesus responds by correcting their assumptions. He says,

"It's not for you to know these times and dates." Then he goes on and says, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Here, Jesus gives them their marching orders. They will be his Spirit-empowered witnesses, starting in Jerusalem and then to the communities and nations beyond.

Notice how he corrects their assumptions about the kingdom. First, he tells them his kingdom isn't political, but rather spiritual. That's seen in how he says the power they'll need and have won't be political power but Holy Spirit power. The kingdom of God is God's rule set up in the lives of individual people by the

power of the Holy Spirit. By the way, that's why politics and elections are not that big of a deal to me. I never get that elated when my people get elected, or my bills get passed, and I never get that bummed out when my people get defeated, or my bills don't get passed. I'm not saying those things don't matter, but we need to be very careful never to equate earthly power with spiritual power. God is doing something totally different. His method is to change people's lives by the power of the Holy Spirit, and then to make them his witnesses. That's how his kingdom spreads, not by soldiers or even by votes, but through witnesses.

Notice also that this kingdom isn't just focused on Israel. These witnesses won't just go to Israel or Judea, but also Samaria and even the remotest parts of the earth. The gospel is like a rock thrown in a pond, causing ripples to spread outward in ever-increasing circles. And that's still going on today. That's a good way for us to think about our own calling as witnesses. We should always start with our own community, our own neighborhoods, our own Jerusalem. What are we doing to establish a witness? And then we should think of the places in the immediate vicinity and beyond, especially where there are people we might not normally want to associate with like Samaria was to the Jewish people at that time. And then we think about the remotest parts of the earth.

Finally, he says the kingdom in its fulness is not immediate but will come at some time in the future when Jesus returns. As Jesus is taken up to heaven, the apostles are staring into the sky, wondering what would happen next. The angels say, "Hey, Men of Galilee" (Galilee wasn't exactly known to have the smartest people in the world. Maybe that's why they call them this here).

"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 have seen him go into heaven" Acts 1:11

It's like, "Guys, stop wasting your time looking up into the sky and get going on this mission. He's coming back, and he'll ask you how you did. Were you faithful to the marching orders he gave you to be his witnesses?"

We all need to take this call to be his witnesses seriously. What is a witness? Do you see yourself as a Spirit-empowered witness? A witness is someone who tells about what he's seen and heard. He gives a first-hand account of what he's experienced. In a court of law, that's all a witness is supposed to do. Opinion or hearsay do not matter, just what you've experienced. Notice we're HIS witnesses. We talk about him. Jesus says, "You will talk about me because you've experienced me. You will talk about what I've done for you." So, it's not something that's forced. It's not something we even have to rehearse. It's just being honest and real about what makes us tick; what's really happened in our lives. As

we allow the Spirit each day to fill our lives, as we stay in fellowship with him, he gives us the power we need.

Not all of us have the gift of evangelism, but all of us are called to be his Spirit-empowered witnesses. Sharing what Jesus can do for others is evangelism; sharing what he's done for you is to be a witness. Let me give you an example of this — the Samaritan women Jesus met at the well in John 4. She was most likely a social outcast - having been married four times and now living with a man. Jesus has a conversation with her and offers her living water that will never run out. He does this even though he knows everything about her. She's overwhelmed and comes to believe he's the Messiah. Listen to what she does,

Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?" They came out of the town and made their way toward him. Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did." John 4:28-30, 39

What I love about this woman is she really wasn't doing evangelism; all she did was tell her story. She didn't have all the i's dotted and t's crossed before she shared her faith. She just went and told people what she'd experienced. She didn't wait until she got a seminary degree or even took a class on how to be a witness; she just did it. You may not be able to explain the gospel as well as Billy Graham did. You may not be able to answer every question thrown at you about the Bible or Jesus or what the church believes. But you can tell your story. You can tell people what he's done in your life.

As a witness, it's good to think of yourself as a bridge-builder. How are bridges built? Many bridges start by shooting a very small nylon rope across a river or canyon. Then a slightly larger rope is attached and pulled across. Then a small cable, then a stronger cable after that, then multiple cables. The process continues until the cables are strong enough to support a superstructure. Eventually, the bridge can help people cross from one side to the other.

God works in the same way. When the Holy Spirit leads you to be a witness in someone's life, remember God has likely already begun the process of building a bridge between that person and himself. Your words and actions are just one narrow rope or cable, among many others. Sometimes, you get to be the last cable in a whole series of cables, and you see a person come to faith right in front of you!

Your job is simply to be open to the opportunities the Holy Spirit puts in front of you. Maybe it's just a part of your story you offer, or maybe it's the whole thing. The bottom line is, when people hear the story of a changed life, they listen. It's not your job to convince anyone of anything. That's up to God. Your job is to tell

your story and invite them to see for themselves that he's the Savior of the world.

There are two mistakes we make, which hinder us as witnesses. Either we're too connected to the world, or we're too disconnected from the world. Those who are too connected to the world aren't effective in their witness because they've basically blended into the point that they're no different at all. Jesus said, *"You're the salt of the earth, but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again?" (Mt. 5:13)*. This is a warning against blending in. Being his witness will cause us to stand out and sometimes even be at odds with those around us.

On the other hand, there are those who are too disconnected from the world. We're so caught up in church and our Christian friends that we've lost touch with anyone in the world. How can you be a witness when you don't have any non-Christian friends? How can you be salt when you're at church three nights a week? If that's the case with you, you need to disconnect from church a bit and find some ways to connect with the world - Coach Little League, join Kiwanis, make friends at the health club. David Kinsman writes: "Being salt and light demands two things: we practice purity in the midst of a fallen world and yet we live in proximity to this fallen world. If you don't hold up both truths in tension, you invariably become useless and separated from the world God loves."

In the year he was elected president, Jimmy Carter was one of three men invited to speak to the 17,000 delegates at the Southern Baptist Convention. Each had a five-minute time limit. The first of the three presenters was Billy Graham. The speaker following him was a truck driver. The man wasn't well educated, and seated beside the next U.S. president; the truck driver shared that he'd never given a speech in his life. He said to Jimmy, "I don't think I can live through it. I just can't do it." After Billy Graham gave his powerful talk, the truck driver rose to speak and stood silently before the audience. Taking a glass of water handed to him, he mumbled into the microphone. "I was always drunk and didn't have any friends. The only people I knew were men like me who hung around the bars in the town where I lived."

The truck driver went on to describe how someone told him about Jesus. Once becoming a Christian, he wanted to tell others about the Lord. Since he felt comfortable in bars, he decided to talk to people there. The bartender wasn't sympathetic and told him he was bad for business and a nuisance. But the truck driver kept on with his mission, and in time the people at the bar began asking questions. He said, "At first they treated me like a joke, but I kept answering questions, and when I couldn't answer one, I went and got the answer and came back with it. Fourteen of my friends became Christians."

Carter writes, "The truck driver's speech was the highlight of the convention. I don't believe anyone who was there will ever forget

that five-minute fumbling statement or remember what even Billy Graham or I had to say.”

It is through ordinary witnesses like him, and like you and me, that Jesus continues to do and teach, even today.

Go back to what Peter said to all of us: *“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect”* (1 Peter 3:15). Notice he doesn’t say be ready to answer all the questions people have about God. You don’t have to know why God allows evil things to happen or explain the difference between predestination and free will. Just be able and willing to explain why you have hope in a world that doesn’t make a lot of sense to most people. Let me ask you, are you prepared to do that? What would you say if someone asked you, “Why are you so hopeful when things are so messed up?” I want to challenge you to write out how you might answer that question.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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