

# Witnessing to the World

## *Our Family Values:*

Acts 1:1-8

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Wesley J. Gabel

Bethany Church

To understand our place in this world, our role as followers of Jesus, we need to know what Jesus' life was all about. Was not his living and dying all about reconciling God's lost children? Jesus did two things: he walked in spiritual fellowship with God; and with divine power he spent his life and time pursuing the lost sheep of Israel. Now listen to the last instructions he gave his followers:

*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... 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 1:4-5, 8, NIV)

His instructions emphasized three things: (1) **wait** for the promised gift of the Holy Spirit, (2) you will **receive** power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and (3) you will **be** – my witnesses throughout the earth. *Wait, receive* and *be* are the three actions he lifted to his followers.

Recently I replaced two faucets at the church parsonage. I knew they needed replacing, but I waited. I held back working on them. I held back tearing into the old faucets until I acquired the replacement parts, some plumbers' putty and my brother. I knew when my brother arrived, he would give me moral support and a skilled hand if I ran into problems; and indeed, I ran into problems and used his encouragement and skilled hand.

Jesus told his followers to wait until they received the gift from their heavenly Father. The gift is the Holy Spirit. Jesus' followers did not attempt to win their neighbors, families or

community until they were equipped, clothed with ability from God, baptized with the Spirit. The Spirit would give them encouragement, counsel and ability to accomplish their assignment.

When I waited to do my plumber job, I did not just sit in idleness. I prepared. Diane brought me a do-it-yourself book on faucets. I looked at the faucets, read the list of tools and prepared everything. Then I waited a little longer until my brother arrived.

Waiting is not just holding back. Waiting is preparing. Jesus' followers prepared themselves for the arrival of the Holy Spirit by gathering for encouragement and prayer. Even after the Holy Spirit came upon those first followers, they waited on the Holy Spirit. They held back in prayer and fasting as they sought counsel and confirmation of the Spirit's direction. In the book of Acts, we read of Paul seeking wisdom from the Holy Spirit as to where he goes and what he does.

The second word of Christ was **receive**. Jesus said that his followers would *receive* power or ability when the Spirit came upon them. It is clear that some of that ability is know-how of what to do and where to go. However, some of that ability is special power to open eyes and hearts, and to heal bodies and souls. Jesus' followers gained the ability to advance the kingdom of God that Jesus proclaimed.

By reading my do-it-yourself book and listening to my brother, I soon had the faucets out. My brother even assisted me when I got stuck, so that I got the task done with power beyond my own. Fellowship with my brother was critical to the outcome.

If we are not in fellowship with the Spirit of God, receiving his counsel and special abilities, what are we doing? We can have every kind of leader and do every kind of program, but in the end we will be frustrated if we attempt the true mission of God. We need to receive.

Third, by virtue of receiving counsel and power from God in the name of Jesus, we are given a special identity. We are witnesses. We don't just witness to others. We must first witness something to give witness to. We can invite people to church and to faith in Jesus, but that is not witnessing. Witnessing is sharing our experience of God.

If you are not excited that God is here saving people from judgment and sin, if you have not witnessed the Lord Jesus speaking and healing people here, why would you ever invite anybody here? In what way would you be a witness of Christ?

The blessing and joy, what we truly value, is that God gives his Holy Spirit to people who repent and believe. We become witnesses of his counsel and power at work. We become witnesses of his Spirit-presence on earth and God's heart.

A core value driving my life and the work of Bethany Church is:

**Witnessing to the World:** *We value our Holy Spirit-empowered identity as Christ's witnesses to all people.*

When you and I receive what God wants us to wait for, our identity changes. We are Holy Spirit-empowered witnesses placed in businesses, schools, homes, neighborhoods and communities.

Jesus told his followers more than that. He told them that they would be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth.

As I meditated on these words, I realized that the vast majority of believers who first received God's Spirit lived in *Jerusalem*. God was making them witnesses to their families and relatives. You and I are witnesses to our families. We need to take that seriously. God placed these believers in Jerusalem to affect its spiritual welfare and God places you in your family to help your family know the love, the power and the person of the Lord. Is that happening? We

can pray together and network together to help that happen. That is what the first believers did. They sought God together. They found counsel from God as they began to impact their homes. We must do that in our classes, small groups, and prayer times. God expects us to see our families blessed with the knowledge and love of God as we work, seek God's counsel and share together.

Judea, for those first empowered with the Holy Spirit, was neighbors, friends and work associates. We can network together with recreation, hobbies, prayer, service, or whatever God's counsel gives us. One way Bethany is helping you right now is with Thank You cards. There is a basket of three different types of Thank You cards at our Welcome Center. The outside says, "Thank you." The inside says, "Thank you;" and then gives you space to write a nice note of thanks. On the other side is the following statement: "I would be honored to have you join me for worship." It then gives the times of worship on Saturday and Sunday. What a special way of caring for those who bless you and honoring your Spirit-empowered identity as Christ's witness.

Samaria was not a comfortable place for the witness of those who first received the Holy Spirit. Christians were uncomfortable with their lifestyle. They did not have a lot in common with the Samaritans. They didn't like the Samaritans because they saw so much that they disagreed with and found offensive.

I know that all of you are planted in Jerusalem as witnesses. I know that most of you are to serve as Christ's witnesses to Judeans. However, some of us must go out to the Samaritans. We must visit those in our neighborhoods and community who wouldn't ordinarily receive an invitation from us, who wouldn't ordinarily experience our love or interest. Do you know what God has led us to do? After praying for some years, we are going to do three things. We are

holding a neighborhood party on our parking lot on Tuesday, August 4<sup>th</sup> as part of the National Night Out observance. St. Luke's Episcopal Church is joining us in this work. We've invited nearby Gethsemane Lutheran to also work with us. If you are not involved in your own neighborhood that night, we encourage you to help us here. However, if people from the Sunset Terrace and Northgate neighborhoods are to attend, they must be invited. If you are okay with knocking on a door, inviting people to a block party, and handing them an invitation that also shares the time of our Bethany Children's Fair and St. Luke's Vacation Bible School, we'd like you to join us for an orientation this Thursday evening at 6:30 p.m. We are Christ's witnesses to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and soon... the uttermost parts of the earth.

All of this begins as we receive the promised gift from the Father, the spiritual presence of Christ that fills our hearts with love. Has that happened for you? If you feel estranged or bewildered by all of this, recognize that the Spirit of Jesus wants to fill your heart with God's love and peace. He wants to take away all fear, all guilt, all regret, and lift your soul in joy. No matter what your past history or your present circumstance, Jesus is knocking on the door of your heart right now. Would you let him forgive you and lead you?

Here is a short prayer: *Dear Jesus, I want to invite you into my heart and ask your forgiveness for my own sins. Thank you for saving me from judgment and presenting me with the gift of eternal life. Amen.*

If you prayed that prayer, if you need prayer for healing, or if you feel distant from God, a prayer team will meet you in the sanctuary here following our worship service.