

# God's Witness Expansion Program

## You Asked For It, Part 3

*Acts 1:6-8*

Luke recorded a fascinating question posed by the disciples of Jesus – I want to take you in this study to the *other* Book in the Bible Luke wrote – the Book of Acts.

Dr. Luke wrote both the Gospel of Luke and the Gospel of Action – we call it the Book of Acts.

In Acts chapter 1, the resurrected Lord is about to ascend back to the Father – the Holy Spirit will descend in a matter of weeks and the New Testament church will be created.

You can only imagine as the Disciples stood on the Mount of Olives with their resurrected Lord; the wind tugging at their garments and deep emotion swirling in their minds and hearts.

The disciples asked this question in *chapter 1 and verse 6. So when they had come together they were asking Him, saying, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" 7. And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; 8. but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.*

In other words, He told them what not to do . . . don't try and set a date for the coming Kingdom.

He then told them what to do – prepare their hearts and lives for the coming Spirit.

In other words, don't try to anticipate the timing of the coming of the Kingdom, but anticipate the coming, baptizing, indwelling, empowering ministry of the Holy Spirit.

***Look further in verse 8 and you shall be My witnesses.***

You notice he did not say to them, "When the Spirit comes upon you, you will begin to witness."

Jesus Christ isn't dealing with what we do; He's dealing with who we are.

Listen, the church is primarily ineffective, not because it isn't doing anything - the church today is making more noise than ever – with so little forward motion.

We're busier than ever - in fact, in the last two decades, there has been more information written on the strategy of the church than in the previous 1,900 years.

If you were to ask the average church, "What does your church do" you'd get everything from strategy to philosophy to mission's statements to strategic planning manuals.

Much of the problem centers around the fact that we have forgotten one important principle - we have forgotten who we are.

We have mistaken motion for movement.

We have replaced the Person with the program.

That's why I find it fascinating that Jesus Christ did ***not say in verse 8, "When the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you shall develop*** methods and strategies and purpose statements – no, no – Jesus said, "There is a Person coming, and when that empowering Person indwells you – ***"You shall be My witnesses."***

While we will have opportunities *to* witness, Jesus informs us that we are to *be* witnesses. Jesus is effectively giving us something much more demanding.

See, you can't contain this in a Thursday night program; you can't put a fish on your bumper and say, "Am I a witness or what?" You can't put 50 bucks in the plate and say, "I did my part."

Jesus Christ is telling us that we have entered a life-long occupation – this is who we are.

The Lord used similar analogies when He said we were to be the salt of the earth (***John 5:13***).

What does salt do? It creates thirst; it prevents decay; it cleanses; it flavors food.

I think it's interesting that Jesus never said we were the sugar of the earth. Although we could all be a little sweeter.

Why not sugar?

I talked about being a North Carolina native and drinking sweet tea.

I remember making oatmeal one morning – I convinced my kids they would like it. Not the pre-made kind in little packets – that's not serious enough. I'm talking about the kind you boil for 5 minutes and then let sit for a while.

They didn't want it – I persisted – put a spoonful into each bowl – I put a dab of butter on top to melt . . . they still weren't interested. I said, "Now, watch this . . . I sprinkled brown sugar all over the top,

added some milk and – presto – they ate three bowls each. Why? Because it's good fiber! No, because it was dessert in a bowl.

And they all said, "Daddy we can taste the sugar . . . this is good."

Has it ever occurred to you that you would never say after a meal, "I really loved that food because I could taste the salt."

Salt is good only in so far as it flavors the food.

And by the way, salt is not for collecting, it's for sprinkling. What we happen to have in this auditorium is a collection of salt – that's fine – we're supposed to gather together and sharpen our saltiness.

But we can't come into contact with the world in here. We have to, as one author wrote, "Get out of the saltshaker and into the world."

***Let's go back to Acts 1:8 and circle that key word – right in the middle of the verse is the word - "witness".***

It happens to be a key word throughout the Book of Action - it will appear in some form or another 29 times.

We are all involved in God's witness expansion program.

### **Now there are actually two ways the believer and the church serve as witnesses:**

#### **1. First, through the way you live.**

This word witness takes us into the drama of a courtroom with the gallery, the jury, the person standing trial, the prosecuting attorney and the defense attorney.

Everything for the most part centers on the testimony of the witnesses.

And let me ask you – in this analogy – who happens to be on trial? The believer? No . . . Jesus Christ.

The Christian is called to be a witness to the validity of the claims of Jesus Christ.

If I can carry this metaphor a little further, the Defense Attorney is the Holy Spirit; the prosecutor is Satan and the world is the jury who will decide on the basis of testimony as to the truth of Jesus Christ.

Now let's play this drama out a little further.

In any courtroom proceeding, one of the primary attempts of the prosecuting attorney is to discredit the testimony of the witness – how do you do that?

You discredit the testimony of the witness by discrediting the character of the witness.

Any good attorney will dig into how that witness lived, talked, acted outside the courtroom, and – by the way – what that witness is like outside the courtroom has a direct bearing on their testimony inside the courtroom.

An effective witness is effective because of the way he lives.

Secondly, an effective witness is effective not only because of the way he lives, but because of the words he speaks.

#### **2. Through the words you speak.**

By the way, to begin talking to someone today by saying, "The Bible says" no longer commands respect or attention.

Only a fraction of our culture now believes that the Bible has any authoritative bearing on life.

We are really no longer a post-Christian world – we are pre-Christian world

The Dean of Asbury Seminaries School of World Mission and Evangelism has written that today we have several things in common with the early church – as never before –so, he writes, we need to learn from them like never before:<sup>1</sup>

#### **1) He said: first, the early church faced a population with little knowledge of the gospel**

Which means it isn't enough today to slip a tract under someone's windshield or into the hand of a waitress and think that'll do it.

They've got some basic questions which will need addressing before they have any basis for understanding, "The wages of sin is death."

#### **2) Not only did they face a population with little knowledge of the Bible, secondly, society included the equal validity of many gods and many religions.**

That would have been unthinkable in our society as little as 30 years ago; America is all about baseball, apple pie and God.

The first two haven't changed . . . but that last one is no longer guaranteed.

Which is why the Democratic National party tested the waters some time ago by dropping out any reference to God as well as Jerusalem serving as the capital of Israel.

The outcry was interesting – revealed primarily through conservative media – armed with footage of

the obvious battle that would have taken place on the floor had the moderator called for a legitimate vote.

I'll never forget watching that footage as the moderator informed the delegates that they were including a reference to God back into their platform – to hear the boos and the outrage by so many delegates.

Today we're watching a definitive change finally surface – the absence of any desire to acknowledge the existence, much less the presence of the God of the Bible.

**Not only did the early church – and we today – face a population with little knowledge of the Bible; encounter a society which included the equal validity of many gods and many religions.**

**3) Thirdly, the witnesses of the first century faced a hostile society with the ever growing potential of persecution.**

We're facing that today.

The church today will continue to be marginalized; to be viewed with more and more suspicion as radical and unwelcome and politically incorrect.

Those pastors and churches communicating biblical definitions for faith and moral beliefs will eventually face a hostile culture and eventually a hostile court system that will penalize and suppress us.

It will begin with financial restrictions and penalties and ultimately imprisonment and perhaps even death.

We are the salt of the earth – which means, we eventually are like salt in an open, festering, decaying wound – which means we create discomfort and arouse displeasure.

If there was ever a time when the church needed to know exactly who she was – and who she was supposed to be, it must be now.

How in the world are we ever going to impact our pre-Christian world in this 21<sup>st</sup> century?

Don't miss the fact that Jesus Christ effectively says that we can't! You're not able to on your own, so I want you to go and wait . . . I'm going to send my Spirit to empower you so that He through you can.

And when He comes you will engage in a witness expansion program.

**Verse 8. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem (that's your own**

**city or community), and in all Judea (that's reaching out further into your own country), then move into Samaria (that's a different culture yet on the same continent as yours) and finally even to the remotest part of the earth - that's every culture of the world.**

Did you notice – this isn't really a plan – this is a geography lesson, not a ministry strategy.

He didn't tell them how to reach Jerusalem; He simply told them who to be in Jerusalem.

So they would have to answer the question themselves – and in every generation the question would have to be asked all over again. How are we to be witnesses?

In other words, in what strategic manner can we testify to the saving power and the life changing gospel of Jesus Christ?

To put it in an even clearer fashion, “In what area of Jerusalem, can we show people who we are and to Whom we belong and what we believe which can redeem their lives as well?”

Harnack, the German church historian wrote that the early church progressed by means of informal missionaries.<sup>ii</sup>

In other words, the early church progressed because every member believed they were informal missionaries.

That phrase, “informal missionaries” was actually coined by Justin Martyr, a 2<sup>nd</sup> century church leader and defender of Christianity in Rome until he was martyred in 165 AD. He wrote that the church moved forward simply because every believer was considered an informal missionary.

We use the term “tent makers” for people who leave our culture and move to China or Africa or Asia, get a job in the market place, but intentionally lived, not for their job, but the opportunities their job afforded them to reach people with the gospel. Listen, are we not all tentmakers – right here – right now?

Do we not all have jobs to basically pay the bills, but allow us the opportunity to be witnesses to our culture for Jesus Christ?

Isn't it the best time ever to strategically position ourselves as a congregation of local, informal missionaries?

And listen, in every culture and in every generation the strategy and needs would be different.

But that's the genius of this answer from Jesus here – God knew that strategies would come and go – tools would come and go – effective methods would change and develop.

Which is why Jesus didn't outline a plan as much as identify a Person – the Holy Spirit – and His people, who are empowered by the Holy Spirit to reach the world.

And we begin here! Locally (Jerusalem) . . . then regionally (Judea) . . . then nationally (Samaria) and finally globally (to the ends of the earth).

He simply said to *be* witnesses – and through the empowering, enlightening Person of the Holy Spirit - you will develop your strategies – some of them will work in the jungles of the Amazon; some of them will work in Slovakia; some of them will work in the hills of Tennessee; in the concrete jungles of New York and right here in our own Wake county.

I want you to know, dear flock, which we've really needed to retool our thinking as leaders in order to effectively reach our own Jerusalem. The toughest place sometimes to reach is home.

Where people know you – where you grew up . . . where you go to school . . . where you work.

That's why it's easy to go to a park in New York and pass out tracts but much harder to go to a park in Raleigh and pass out tracts.

You'll never see those people in Central Park again . . . but you go to school and live next to those people in Fuquay.

Here's a thought that has caused me a lot of soul searching over the past year especially. It's this question – here it is – if the ministry of Colonial Baptist Church were to disappear tomorrow, what would suffer as a result?

If this campus turned back into a hay field, which it what it was for more than a century – what would happen?

And if we disappeared along with it . . . what would suffer loss in our community – in our region – in our nation – in our world – what would be adversely affected?

What would change? What would be shorthanded? What would suffer? Who would miss us?

Can I tell you that as I've thought about that for months, I really don't like my answers.

I have never invited the Mayor of my city out to lunch . . . my secretary did that this week – I'm going to find out the answer tomorrow.

It also occurred to me that I have never invited our Governor to church – he's new – he might not have a church home? That invitation was sent to him as well this past week.

So get ready . . . we're praying and strategizing about how to be a witness in Jerusalem and all the way to the ends of the earth.

In many ways, it's returning to the basic message and the basic issues of the gospel.

During Vince Lombardi's years at Green Bay, the Packers were humiliated by an opposing team. The packers did everything wrong. The very next day at practice, Coach Lombardi stood before his players with a football in his hand. He said, "Gentlemen, we're going to start all over; as if we knew nothing about this game . . . we're going back to the basics . . . we're going to go back to the very beginning!" Then he said, "This object I am holding in my hand is a football." One of the players said: "Not so fast."

The church must return to the basic truth - according to this passage, you are not a computer technician, you're not a housewife; you're not a salesman, executive, painter, secretary, teacher - that's what you do - what you are is a witness; called to take the stand, in the courtroom of your influence, and testify for the name and cause of Jesus Christ.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 2/3/2013 by Stephen Davey.

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i (Christianity Today, Dec. 16, 1991)

ii James Montgomery Boice, Romans: Volume 4, (Baker Books, 1995), p. 1875