

UNIT 29

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YOU WILL BE

MY WITNESSES

“Filled with the Spirit”

by Mike Brooks

Perhaps you’ve been there. You’re at the birthday celebration of a child, and she’s holding up her new toy triumphantly, moments away from ripping open the packaging. Then the thought etches across the mind of an unwitting parent: I wonder if it came with batteries or if I needed to buy them separately. In one fell swoop, the packaging disappears, buttons are pressed, and reality sets in. The summer’s hottest new toy is reduced to a hunk of plastic, tossed in the corner and in need of triple-A-sized help.

We’re regularly reminded in this life of our own great need for help. Whether in the workplace, on campus, at home, or in our neighborhoods—the demands of this life are often more than we are capable of handling on our own. This is certainly true of the Christian life as well. Thankfully, as believers, we are well-resourced to carry out all that God has purposed for us to do. Yet, over and again, we are reminded that this miraculous assistance is not the result of our own cunning or human effort. Rather, it is

the work of the Holy Spirit, who works powerfully in and through our lives toward God’s intended purposes.

THERE’S NO SUCH THING AS ROGUE CHRISTIANITY

Before His ascension to heaven, Jesus left His disciples specific instructions to follow as they awaited His eventual return. “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations,” He told them, “baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20a). On its face, the task seems daunting. Engaging in a global effort to proclaim the gospel and help others become devoted followers of Christ is not for the faint of heart.

But Jesus reminded His followers that they did not have to engage in the work alone. He reminded the disciples that He has all authority and He promised to be with them (Matthew 28:20b). Specifically, Jesus promised the disciples

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the Holy Spirit would come upon them to sustain them for the great missionary task ahead (Acts 1:8).

Today, as believers, we lay hold to the same mission as those early disciples and we are given the same help along the way. The New Testament picture of a Christian engaged in the mission of Christ is not that of an individual bearing the weight and responsibility of the work alone. The same Spirit dwelling in and with Jesus's followers in the book of Acts continues to dwell inside of us (1 Corinthians 3:16). The Holy Spirit guides, comforts, and empowers followers of Jesus as we seek to faithfully obey God's will. As those united now to Christ by faith, we are now direct beneficiaries of the Spirit's magnificent power and His faithful presence.

WE NEED THE SPIRIT'S POWER

Because we are incapable of saving ourselves, the Holy Spirit's work in our salvation is vital. In the work of salvation, the Spirit applies to our lives all that Christ has accomplished in and through His perfect life, His sacrificial death, and His resurrection. We become aware of and increasingly convicted over our sinful state as a result of the Spirit's work in our lives (John 16:8-11). The Spirit leads us

to true repentance and brings about our new birth through the miraculous work of regeneration (3:3-5). In addition to being washed clean, we have right-standing (justification) and are being made holy (sanctification) as a result of the Spirit's powerful work in our lives.

The Spirit is at work in other ways too. The Holy Spirit is ever at work in the lives of believers, guiding and empowering us to fulfill God's will for our lives individually and together. In Scripture, we see the Spirit's work is as multi-faceted as it is miraculous. The Spirit supplies the power needed to (a) overcome sin, (b) reveal truth found in God's Word, (c) walk in faithfulness and freedom, (d) discern the will of God, and (e) help us use our spiritual gifts for the spread of the gospel and the building up of the body of Christ.

WE RELY ON THE SPIRIT'S PRESENCE

As believers, we experience not only the Holy Spirit's power but His presence as we seek to live according to the truth we have found in Jesus. The Spirit indwells believers and is given as a deposit both as a source of power and as surety for the eternal promises of God in salvation. The Spirit is a helper, sent for the purposes

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of teaching and reminding believers of Jesus's instructions (John 14:26). The Spirit is a blessed source of comfort amid various trials (Acts 9:31) and intercedes for us in prayer when our thoughts are inexpressible (Romans 8:26).

There is no question: remaining aware of the Spirit's power and presence in our lives isn't always easy. Human beings have a remarkable tendency to return to the well-worn paths of self-governance and self-determination. Yet, the essence of our new identity as those saved and redeemed by God runs against the grain of all our more natural, self-centered impulses.

Because of the high calling placed on our lives, even a seasoned Christian will feel inadequate for the task at hand. Understanding that salvation itself is a gift from God, and not a work of our own doing, bears witness to the fact that maturity and growth in our Christian walk is the powerful work of the Spirit as well. What is more, beyond the Spirit's work in our own lives, we also rely on the Spirit's power and presence in the lives of those who do not yet believe. Because we have been saved by the work of God, we seek to fulfill our mission of sharing the gospel—trusting not in our own power, but rather in the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit to change the lives of others.



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THE COMMISSION RECEIVED

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SESSION IN A SENTENCE:

Jesus's disciples were to carry out their mission of telling the world about Him, a mission they could only fulfill through the power of the Holy Spirit.

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BACKGROUND PASSAGE:

Acts 1

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SETTING:

Acts picks up where the Gospel of Luke ends. After Jesus's resurrection, He spent forty days with His disciples, teaching them about the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3). He did this to prepare them for life and ministry in His physical absence. The disciples were nervous and anxious about the next phase of their lives and ministry, but Jesus gathered them, commissioned them, and assured them of the promise of the Holy Spirit and His physical return.

DAY 1

READ:

Acts 1:1-5

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 1:1-2

NOTES

In basketball, good teams must have a strong center. The center is the player who is positioned in the middle of the court and is responsible for anchoring the team's defense and offense. Without a strong center, the team can quickly become disorganized and lose its focus.

Acts 1:1 reminds us that Jesus is to be at the center of all Christian faith. In this verse, Luke clearly states that his Gospel account was focused on all that Jesus began to do and teach. Likewise, the book of Acts focused on the ministry of Jesus as He established the church through His disciples. For Luke, it is "all about Jesus."

This is a great reminder of the importance of keeping Jesus at the center of our faith. It can be easy to get caught up in our own opinions, our own preferences, or the teachings of others. However, as Christians, we must always remember that Jesus is the foundation of our faith, and everything else is secondary.

As we go about our days, let us remember that Jesus is the center of our faith. Just as a basketball team needs a strong center, we need Jesus at the center of our lives to keep us focused, strong, and effective. Let us keep our eyes fixed on Him and trust in Him alone, for He is the One who gives us hope, purpose, and meaning in this life and the next.

How can we intentionally keep Jesus at the center of our faith and daily life, despite the distractions and temptations of the world?

DAY 2

READ:

Acts 1:1-5

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 1:4-5

NOTES

Have you ever waited for an extravagant gift? Something that you knew was coming, but you weren't quite sure when or how it would arrive? The waiting can be difficult, but when the gift finally arrives, it is all the more precious.

The Holy Spirit is the Father's promise to us, an extravagant gift that was promised to the believers before Jesus's ascension (Acts 1:4-5; John 14:16-17). The disciples had to wait for the Holy Spirit to come, and it was not an easy wait. They were likely anxious, uncertain, and impatient. But when the Holy Spirit finally arrived, it was an extravagant gift that transformed their lives and empowered them for the work of spreading the gospel.

The Holy Spirit is still the Father's promise to us today, a wonderful gift He has provided to us. The Holy Spirit is not a force or a power, but the Third Person of the Trinity to live within us and guide us in our daily lives. He empowers us to live the Christian life, teaches us, comforts us, and unites us with other believers.

As Christians, we often can forget the significance of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We may take Him for granted or fail to acknowledge Him as the guide and comforter that He is. However, when we remember that the Holy Spirit is the Father's promise, we are reminded of God's faithfulness to us. Just as He promised to send the Holy Spirit to the believers, He promises to be with us always and to guide us through life.

How should the awareness of the Holy Spirit being in your life impact your daily life and relationship with God?

DAY 3

READ:

Matthew 28:16-20

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Matthew 28:19-20

NOTES



KEY DOCTRINE #85: MISSION OF THE CHURCH

The church is a sign and instrument of the kingdom of God, a people united by faith in the gospel announcement of the crucified and risen King Jesus. The mission of the church is to go into the world in the power of the Spirit and make disciples by proclaiming this gospel, calling people to respond in ongoing repentance and faith, and demonstrating the truth and power of the gospel by living under the lordship of Christ for the glory of God and the good of the world.

The Great Commission to be Christ's witnesses throughout the world is often viewed as a burdensome task, something that we have to do as Christians. However, we should not view it this way. Instead, we should see the Great Commission as a high honor assigned to us by Jesus Christ Himself. We have been entrusted with the privilege and responsibility of reaching the world for Jesus. We have been chosen by God to be His ambassadors, to share the good news of salvation with others, and to make a difference in the world. We have a purpose and a mission, and our lives have meaning and significance. We have been given the honor of sharing the most important message in the world, the message of God's love and grace.

When we view the Great Commission as a high honor, it changes our perspective. We no longer see it as something we have to do, but something we get to do. We get to be part of God's work in the world, sharing the gospel with others and making disciples of all nations. We get to see lives transformed, relationships restored, and communities changed. What an incredible honor and privilege this is!

How can shifting our perspective of the Great Commission as a burdensome task to a high honor change the way we approach evangelism and discipleship?

DAY 4

READ:

Psalm 150; Acts 1:4-11

FOCAL PASSAGES:

Psalm 150:6; Acts 1:8

NOTES

Psalm 150 is a beautiful hymn of praise that encourages us to worship God with all of our being. The psalmist exhorts us to praise God with instruments, with our voices, and with our bodies. He tells us to praise God in His sanctuary, in His mighty heavens, and everywhere on earth.

God deserves our praise and there is joy when we praise the Lord. Because we experience joy in the worship and praise of the Lord, we should desire others to experience that same joy.

The Great Commission of Christ to His disciples in Acts 1:8 is an extension of this call to worship. As Jesus explained, we are to be witnesses of Jesus Christ to people everywhere, both near and far. In our act of worship and praise of God in every part of our being, others may see God and our joy in Him.

By fulfilling the Great Commission, we fulfill Psalm 150:6 in letting everything that has breath praise the Lord.

How can you praise God this week that others may see your joy in Him?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Join all ye living things in the eternal song. Be ye least or greatest, withhold not your praises. What a day will it be when all things in all places unite to glorify the one only living and true God! This will be the final triumph of the church of God."¹

—Charles H. Spurgeon
(1834–1892)

DAY 5

READ:

Matthew 25:14-30

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Matthew 25:19-23

NOTES

Acts 1:4-11 relayed the final instructions of Christ before He ascended to heaven. His disciples are commanded to focus on their mission to spread the gospel and make disciples of all nations, even as they wait for His return. This is similar to the parable of the talents Jesus told in Matthew 25:14-30. A master entrusted his servants with different amounts of money and expected them to use those resources wisely to produce a profit for him.

When we consider the two teachings together, we see how they complement one another. As we await the return of Christ, we are called to use the gifts and resources that God has given us to wisely serve Him and to further His kingdom.

We are not to be idle or to bury the resources God has given us, but to be diligent and faithful in all that we do for the sake of the gospel. Just as the disciples were instructed to be witnesses to the ends of the earth, we too are called to share the good news of Christ with all people.

We can do this through our words and actions, by getting involved in missions work, supporting missionaries, and praying for those who are sharing the gospel in difficult places. We can also share the gospel with our friends, neighbors, and coworkers. We can use the resources God's given us to share the gospel in creative ways, for example, through music, art, and storytelling as well.

What practical steps can you take to be a faithful and wise steward of what God has given you as you await Christ's return?

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“Certainly we must never conceive ‘salvation’ in purely negative terms, as if it consisted only of our rescue from sin, guilt, wrath and death. We thank God that it is all these things. But it also includes the positive blessing of the Holy Spirit to regenerate, indwell, liberate and transform us. What a truncated gospel we preach if we proclaim the one without the other! And what a glorious gospel we have to share when we are true to Scripture! When sinners repent and believe, Jesus not only takes away their sins but also baptizes them with his Spirit.”²

—John Stott (1921–2011)

POINT 1: Jesus’s disciples rely on the power of the Spirit (Acts 1:4-5).

In some of His last words, Jesus reminded the disciples of the promise and blessing of the Holy Spirit.

? How do you see the Holy Spirit as a promised blessing in the life of a believer?

Because of Jesus and the Father’s promise, believers are baptized with the Holy Spirit.

? From Day 2: How should the awareness of the Holy Spirit being in your life impact your daily life and relationship with God?

POINT 2: Jesus’s disciples fulfill the mission of the Father (Acts 1:6-8).

The disciples had hopes for Israel, but Christ shifted their focus to the Father’s greater plan for the nations.

? Why was it important for Christ to refocus the disciples’ attention from the restoration of Israel to the Father’s ultimate plan?

KEY DOCTRINE #85: MISSION OF THE CHURCH

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Do you think the first disciples completed this commission and why?

POINT 3: Jesus's disciples anticipate the return of the Son (Acts 1:9-11).

After commissioning the disciples and providing them with all they needed to accomplish that commission, Jesus ascended to heaven.



In John 14:1-7, the disciples were distraught at the thought of Christ leaving. Why do they now seem composed in Acts as He returned to the Father?

Christ's disciples must wait for His return by carrying out His commission to take the gospel to all people.



How should our anticipation for Christ's return motivate our activity to be His witnesses?

MY RESPONSE

Because we have been saved as a result of the Son of God coming to us, we go and make disciples of all nations by declaring the truth of the gospel with the power of the Holy Spirit through our words and actions.

- **HEAD:** How would taking on the responsibility to be a witness for Christ influence your daily decisions and actions?
- **HEART:** What are the distractions in your life that prevent you from prioritizing or obeying Christ's commission that you need to confess?
- **HANDS:** What are ways you can be involved personally and cooperatively with others to see the gospel go to all people everywhere?



Scan this QR code to access this session's Scripture passages.

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"Jesus' commission to evangelize the world was not a suggestion to be considered but a command to be obeyed. Jesus' followers did not consider this Great Commission to evangelize the world as an option to entertain but rather saw it as a mandate to fulfill whatever the cost."³

—Dave Earley