

**“You will be My Witnesses
Acts 1:4 – 8**

“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.”

So when they met together, they 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.”

So this morning we continue in the Book of Acts.

We’ve looked at how Jesus continues his ministry in the book of Acts and even into today.

Last time we talked about the kingdom of God , that Jesus is the king in the kingdom, and that his kingdom is established in the hearts and lives of people. It is not currently geographical but one day it will be.

Today we have quite a dense passage.

What I want to pick up on is an area we looked at few weeks back and it’s found in verse 8.

Jesus gives the commission to the church, there reason for being.

He says you will be my “witnesses”.

We talked about this a few weeks ago and do you remember the 3 ways we witness?

In deed, in word and sometime with silence.

The word ‘witness’ in its various forms occurs 36 times in Acts.

When it does it primarily and overwhelmingly is referring to what form of witness?

Words.

There is a place for silence and deeds but eventually there must be a place for speaking.

The primary missional activity of the Early Church in Acts is to bear witness to Jesus, especially through the verbal speech act of *evangelism*.
I'm passionate about this for a number because someone, actually a number of people, took the time to tell me.

We've forgotten how terrible it is to be lost.

As many of you know, I come from a non-Christian home. By that we didn't go to church at Christmas or Easter and in fact it was a number of years before I set foot in church.

But I had people who told me about the love God shown to us in his Son King Jesus.

I mean there was Mrs "Disco Duck", who came into my primary school to take my Bible in schools class. She seemed so ancient (she was probably my age) but through her I first heard about this Jesus.

I had neighbours whose Christian witness included reading the Bible over dinner time and if I was over there I would listen in.

And then I had the Gideon's Bible given to every student in high school.

I was lost but then Jesus found me.

Throughout the 1970's through to the 1990's, there was a massive move to see people sharing and hearing the good news of Jesus.

It was influenced by the charismatic renewal happening across denominations and it saw many, many people coming to faith in Jesus.

Today, evangelism has fallen on hard times.

In fact when people talk about being missional, 'evangelism' hardly gets mentioned.

In fact when say the 'E' you can see people – Christian people – recoil.

"Why do you think that is?"

Tell the person next to you.

- It think for many it became *formulaic*. Memorise this, use these particular phrases, follow this pattern and you are guaranteed success.

So it just seemed for some to be so unnatural and inauthentic.

- For some it has been portrayed in predominantly *confrontational*.

Some evangelism seems more like an argument than an invitation to know and follow Jesus.

- The *cultural push-back* has increased.

To be a Christian – a follower of Jesus – in some circles is to be as a social outcast and even a threat to well-being of society.

In fact the early followers of Jesus were seen in that light.

- The rise of the “isms”

Secularism which says faith is entirely private and does not belong in the public square.

Pluralism which says all systems of faith are equal.

Universalism which says that in the end, all will be saved.

These ‘isms’ and others have undermined confidence in the gospel.

- We have catastrophized it.

Every opportunity is going to be a disaster. If I open my mouth about Jesus, it’s going to be thrown back in my face. People are going to mock and ridicule me.

These are very real objections (I’m sure there’s more).

Is that correct?

I hear you.

So what do you do?

I think some of us need to park stuff, stuff that can get in the way.

And we see that here.

I mean, what were the disciples really concerned about?

“Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”

In other words when are you going to rule in your fullness as King and bring justice and peace and liberation to this nation of Israel?

Jesus doesn’t say what they are asking is unimportant but what does say is there is something more important.

So our objections are important.

But what is more important than our objections is being a witness with words to Jesus.

Jesus should be given all the honour he deserves.

We give witness to who Jesus is and what Jesus has done, especially in your own life.

You know something to be true and have experienced it to be true to carry that to other people.

And remember we have been given a message of hope and life.

That Jesus came into this world, he healed the sick, he drove out demonic entities, he taught about what life really is and didn't just say, "This is the way to God" but "I am the way".

Jesus came to bring the peace of God and peace with God.

He gave himself to the horror of a Roman cross, dying for our sins and rose from the dead so that we can have forgiveness and pardon and be reconciled and brought into relationship with God.

And since Jesus is King we don't have to be ruled by our circumstances or failures or upbringing and or even our personalities anymore.

Jesus can have the final say.

There are times when we need to park our objections for the sake of the person standing in front of us who far from God.

Jesus goes on to say "you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Does that mean every one of us is called to become overseas, cross-cultural missionaries?

Well, some of us are.

I think a paraphrase is this: you will my witnesses anywhere, anyplace and anytime.

That does not mean *everywhere, every place and every time*.

But it does mean that all of us, when the opportunity presents itself, can be a witness with words anywhere, anyplace and anytime.

It doesn't belong to the special few.

If you have your Bibles come with me to Acts 8:1 – 4:

"On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him.

But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison. Those who had been scattered preached the word *wherever* they went.”

Acts 11:19 – 21

“Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed travelled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews.

Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus.

The Lord’s hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.”

In other words, you can do it.

So true story

Steve was a plumber in Aussie, in Queensland, just over the ditch, and for most of his life was your typical Australian sceptic when came to religion. It wasn’t a staunch atheist but he’d never been to church and his contact with Christians left him with the impression they’re all hypocrites.

However Steve had time for one Christian he knew, a cycling friend. Every Saturday morning they would go for a ride for an hour or so, you know getting the heart rate up and having the odd conversation.

So one time they riding along and Steve would start to pontificate, you know mouth off about all the hypocrites who go church. You know, they’re all a bunch of so-and-so’s who go to church on Sunday’s and live very ordinary lives for the rest of the week.

His friend, he just listened and then one day he said in a very respectful way, “C’mon mate. Don’t go worrying about those people. God will look after them. You worry about yourself and God. That’s the important thing.” And then they rode on in silence.

The thing is, those words powerfully affected Steve.

For the rest of the day he pondered what a hypocrite he had been to criticise Christians when he was doing nothing to honour God himself. The words – “You worry about yourself and God” – went around and around in his head. By the evening Steve was convinced he was the one with the spiritual problem. He got alone and uttered a prayer, an apology

to the God he had been ignoring his whole life. The very next morning he took himself off to church – along with all the other hypocrites – and to the surprise of everyone, especially himself, he devoted his life to Christ.

The next time he went riding he told his friend he was now a Christian and that his few words had powerfully affected him. His friend replied, “What did I say? I can’t remember.”

So to finish that story is a reminder that when we witness, when we give verbal witness to Jesus, we are not the primary ones speaking.

The primary evangelist in Acts and in fact all throughout history is who?
The Holy Spirit.

Jesus says the gift of the Father to you is the Holy Spirit.
He says the real power behind your witness isn’t your eloquence with words or the force of your personality.

You pray that when you speak that the Holy Spirit will speak the loudest.