

Ascension Day
May 13, 2010

Acts 1:1-11
175-173-169

“You Will Be My Witness”

- I. “You have the facts.”
- II. “You have the power.”
- III. “You will see Me again.”

Dear Christian friends,

That must have been QUITE THE SIGHT – Jesus ascending into heaven. They had gathered at the **“Mount of Olives.”** The **“Mount of Olives”** – that’s where Jesus had ridden the donkey into Jerusalem. The **“Mount of Olives”** was also the site of the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus had prayed in such great anguish. As they now ONCE MORE STOOD on the Mount of Olives Jesus **“lifted up His hands and blessed them.”** As Jesus blessed them **“He was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid Him from their sight.”** Yes, that must have been quite the sight!

The disciples were not to keep on staring into the sky. They HAD WORK to do. As we celebrate our Lord’s ascension we are not to stare into the sky. We too have **work to do**. “YOU WILL BE MY WITNESSES,” our **ascended** Lord Jesus tells us and then He also reminds us, 1)“You have the facts,” 2)“You have the power” and 3)“You will see Me again.”

I. **“You have the facts.”**

“You will be My witnesses.” That’s the Lord’s call to do mission work – the call to share our Christian faith and hope with our families and **friends**, our neighbors and the world. Peter echoed that call when he wrote, **“Always be prepared to give an answer to anyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.”** Paul told Timothy, **“Do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord.”**

So what does a **“witness”** do? Think of a witness in court. A witness simply tells “THE TRUTH – the WHOLE truth and nothing but the truth.” The witness tells what he **saw** and **heard**. The witness doesn’t know everything. He doesn’t have all the **answers**. A witness presents what he knows and LETS THE FACTS SPEAK for themselves. That is exactly what we do as **Jesus’** witnesses. We don’t argue anyone into becoming a Christian. We don’t convert anyone. The Holy Spirit converts people THROUGH THE FACTS about Jesus.

Luke wrote his **gospel** and **this book** of Acts TO SHARE those facts with a man named Theophilus. **“After His suffering, Jesus showed Himself to** (the apostles) **and gave many convincing proofs that He was alive.”** Jesus had suffered. He had died. We know NOT ONLY those **facts** but also the WHY of those facts. Jesus suffered and died TO SAVE us from our sins and from **ending up** in hell forever. Jesus – who is NONE OTHER than the eternal Son of God **in the flesh** – Jesus had lived an **absolutely holy** life – perfectly obeying all the commandments for us. Then Jesus took the blame for the sins of the whole world and **suffered and died to pay** for every one of them in full. Jesus sacrificed His holy life – He shed His precious blood – to **“take away the sin of the world.”** AS Jesus’ witnesses we must clearly share those **facts**.

And we must JUST AS CLEARLY witness Jesus **risen** from the dead. We must not leave Jesus ON the cross or IN the grave. Jesus is done paying for our sins. Jesus is no longer dead. We have - and we witness - our RISEN, LIVING Lord Jesus.

Those FACTS of Jesus’ **death** and **resurrection** proclaim Jesus is our PERFECT Savior. Those facts proclaim – and WE WITNESS – that **trusting** in Jesus we have God’s forgiveness of all our sins.

Trusting in Jesus we are reconciled and reunited with our Creator. **Trusting** in Jesus we have God's promise of eternal life in heaven when we die. That's what the APOSTLES WITNESSED. Peter preached on Pentecost, ***"Repent, and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins may be forgiven."*** Paul told the Philippian jailer, ***"Believer on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved."*** OUR WITNESS must echo theirs.

II. "You have the power."

"You will be My witnesses." Jesus didn't say we SHOULD be His witnesses. EVERY Christian is automatically a witness for Jesus. We witness to Jesus **both WITH WHAT we say and BY HOW we live** our lives. It's been said that the ONLY BIBLE the **unbeliever reads** is the life of his Christian neighbor. **Each one** of us needs to be concerned about WHAT we are witnessing to our own families - our neighbors, etc. - WITH the way we live our lives - the language we use - our priorities in life, etc. Our lives CAN RUIN any witness we give about Jesus.

As Jesus was getting ready to ascend He told the apostles, ***"Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift My Father promised, which you have heard Me speak about."*** Jesus was referring to the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. Jesus had talked to them a lot about that on Maundy Thursday evening. Jesus further explained Pentecost by adding, ***"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."***

The apostles were to witness RIGHT THERE where they were in Jerusalem. But they weren't to stop there but GO OUT into all the world. Jesus hasn't given us the OPTION of **witnessing here** in Fox Lake OR doing mission work somewhere else. Jesus says, "DO BOTH." You ***"will be My witnesses"*** in Fox Lake and in **America** and ***"to the ends of the earth."*** Jesus also reassures us, "You HAVE THE POWER to do just that."

"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you." Witnessing Jesus - sharing our faith - STARTS with **giving up** on ourselves. The POWER to do this is not found IN OURSELVES - it comes from the Holy Spirit. Paul put it this way, ***"We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us."***

The Holy Spirit EMPOWERS us to be Jesus' witnesses and He gives us the MEANS to do the job - the means of grace - the **gospel** in Word and Sacraments. Matthew records Jesus saying, ***"Go and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."*** Don't overlook that ***"everything"*** - ***"everything I have commanded you."*** We are not being FAITHFUL witnesses if we tamper with or ignore anything Jesus tells us in His Word. We are NOT HELPING Jesus' kingdom come if we are more concerned about being POPULAR with people than being FAITHFUL to God's Word.

That thinking ties in with the disciples' question here. ***"Lord, are You at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"*** After three years with Jesus the Master Teacher the disciples still didn't know everything. They were still looking for Jesus to **establish** a GRAND and GLORIOUS KINGDOM here on earth. Many people still want to **make the gospel** a message of PEACE and PROSPERITY in this life.

But as Jesus told Pilate, ***"My kingdom is not of this world."*** God's kingdom is not an earthly kingdom but a SPIRITUAL - a HEAVENLY one. God's kingdom is God ruling in **people's hearts** through His Word. Paul once wrote, ***"God has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and***

brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. Think of how Luther explained it in the catechism. “God’s kingdom comes when our heavenly Father GIVES US His Holy Spirit so that **by His grace** we believe His holy Word and lead godly lives now and in eternity.”

And so God’s kingdom HAS BEEN COMING **down through** the ages. It came to thousands of people that first Pentecost Sunday. It came to families like those of **Cornelius** and the **Philippian jailer**. It came to individual people like Saul on the road to Damascus or the Ethiopian eunuch on his way home. It has come TO US today and is now ours to PASS ON. ***“You will be My witnesses.”***

III. ***“You will see Me again.”***

Then it happened. ***“After He had said this, He was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid Him from their sight.”*** Our Lord now lives in His **state of exaltation**. EVEN AS Jesus had laid aside the **full use** of His divine powers so He could suffer and die for us – SO NOW Jesus is fully using all His divine powers all the time. Jesus sitting at God’s right hand is not Jesus TWIDDLING His thumbs but Jesus FULLY IN CHARGE and in control – working all things for the good of His people. Jesus sitting at God’s right hand is MEANT TO COMFORT and **encourage** us in our Christian lives and witnessing. Jesus doesn’t promise us an EASY life now. He warns us that the devil will try whatever it takes to destroy the Church. But Jesus WILL TAKE CARE of us. ***“We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.”***

Not only that – we ALSO HAVE Jesus’ promise that we will see Him again. ***“This same Jesus ...will come back in the same way you have seen Him go into heaven.”*** Jesus will return VISIBLY and BODILY in all His divine glory – attended by His holy angels. Jesus will return to TAKE US body and soul to heaven’s glory. ***“In My Father’s house are many mansions. I go and prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto Myself, that you also may be where I am.”***

That promise SPURS US ON in our witnessing. That’s what it’s ALL ABOUT – sharing Jesus so that others may join us in **believing** in Jesus and be ready for when Jesus returns. We are to be Jesus’ ***“witnesses”*** TO THE WORLD because ***“whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”***

That promise also ADDS URGENCY to our witnessing. Once a person dies it’s TOO LATE **to talk to him** about Jesus. Once we die it’s **too late** for us to talk to anyone else about Jesus. Once Jesus returns there will be NO MORE WITNESSING for Jesus. ***“It’s not for (us) to know the times or dates the Father has set by His own authority”*** – but we can be sure that day is EVEN CLOSER than before.

It was QUITE THE SIGHT when Jesus ascended into heaven. It will be **quite the sight** when He returns on the Last Day. Then add to that sight the great multitude READY and WAITING because Christians have been faithfully witnessing Jesus to the world. Amen.

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