

Witness to the World: Called to Make Disciples of Jesus Christ

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[0 : 00] We're going to turn now to our Bibles, and if you're here this morning, you will be familiar with our first reading because we read it this morning. It's at the end of Luke's Gospel, chapter 24, reading a few verses there, beginning at verse 44, and then again we're coming back to the Acts of the Apostles, but this time in chapter 1, and we're reading the beginning of that.

So the end of Luke's first volume, and the very beginning of his second volume. Luke, chapter 24, at verse 44.

And that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things.

And behold, I'm sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you're clothed with power from on high. Flick over to Acts, chapter 1, and the story continues.

In the first book, O Theophilus, I've dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen.

[1 : 39] To them, he presented himself alive after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during 40 days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

And while staying with them, he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which he said, You heard from me. But John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.

So when they'd come together, they asked him, Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? He said to them, It's not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority, but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.

And when he'd said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up and a cloud took them out of their sight. While they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes and said, Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven?

This Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven. Amen.

[3 : 05] And may God bless to us his word. Amen. Well, good evening. Please do turn back to those readings from earlier, end of Luke's gospel, and also the start of Acts.

We get to have those ready at hand as we begin our service this evening. We're picking up where Willie left off last week. We're in the midst of a series in these evenings.

Think about what we are as a church and the key elements of being a member of this church. And we primarily worship. We've seen that in the past two weeks.

We worship as we go out into the world and everyday lives, but also we worship as we gather here Sunday by Sunday. I'm going to take these next few evenings, looking at each of those key areas of church life, using the acronym Worship.

And first tonight is our witness, our mission, our evangelism. So that's what we're doing this evening. Now, my aim this evening is to lift our eyes beyond our immediate horizon, both in terms of geography and time, to lift them beyond these church walls, to lift them to the city that we live in, and beyond to the world that we inhabit.

[4 : 29] To lift our eyes above our temporal, immediate concerns that soften and fill our minds, our to-do lists, and instead of those things, to focus on eternal realities, eternal destinies of those that we live and work and love.

You see, if we believe the Bible, if we take Jesus at his word, then we will know that eternal lives are at stake. We know that death is not the end, and that everyone will either spend eternity with our creator God in the new creation, or eternally separated from him in hell.

Those are eternal realities. They are real. We know death is not the end. And if we are followers of Jesus, then there is nothing more pressing, nothing more urgent, nothing more loving that we can do for our fellow citizens, nothing better to give our lives to than the task that Jesus has given us, the task he's given you as his church.

And the task is being his witnesses, being his ambassadors, his messengers, with good news on our lips.

It is the task of holding out eternal life, eternal salvation, of hope beyond death, of being made right with the creator of the universe, through the forgiveness of our sin.

[6 : 03] It is the task that Jesus gave to his church as he ascended into heaven. We just read it this evening, where he told his followers what to do.

Listen again to those words at the end of Luke's gospel. He says he opened their minds to understand the scriptures and said to them, Thus it is written that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you, but stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.

This is our most urgent task. The biggest problem the world faces is not COVID. It's not to say it's not serious, but relative to eternal destinies and salvation, COVID is relatively unimportant.

It is one way that people may die, but there are many others. All of us will in the end face death. Almost 2,000 people a day die in the UK.

[7 : 21] So the biggest question we must face is surely this. Are people prepared for death? Are people we know, live alongside, work alongside, are they prepared for death?

And it's our task to prepare people for that, to prepare people to meet their creator, to meet their maker. And we do that by being his witnesses to all the earth.

We are called to go and make disciples of Jesus Christ. That is our task. That is the job he's given his church from that moment there at the end of Luke to when he returns.

That's our task. So three questions to ask this evening about that task that Jesus has given to his church. Three simple questions. What, how, and why?

What is the content of our message, our witness? How are we to do it? But then most importantly, why? Why are we to witness?

[8 : 28] So the first of those three questions, what is the content of our witness? We have a message. But it's not an idea or a philosophical system.

Our message is based in reality. It is based on verifiable historical events. The gospel is about how God saves rebellious people for all eternity through Jesus.

And primarily it's the events of the life, death, resurrection of Jesus that are the focus. They are, as we've heard this morning, they are the great culmination of all that was promised in the Old Testament scriptures in terms of a savior who would reconcile wayward people to their creator.

Everything was building towards Jesus and his fulfillment of all that was promised. Look again there at Luke 24. I'll read again from verse 44.

Jesus speaking to his disciples. He says, These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you that everything written about me and the law of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.

[9 : 44] Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, said to them, Thus it's written, that Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead. You are my witnesses of these things.

You see, our message is about facts in history. Jesus' death, his resurrection. But it's not merely that, is it?

Notice verses 46 and 47. He says, Yes, proclaim that the Christ should suffer on the third day rise from the dead and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations.

So it's not just the events that we share. We're also to share the significance of those events, the implications of his death and resurrection. And that is repentance, seeking forgiveness for sins.

Those events had a meaning. They weren't just random events, they were there for a reason. And our job, our task, is to proclaim the events and the meaning behind it.

[10 : 56] We present the facts, of course we do, but we also issue a call for repentance, for forgiveness of sins. We're to preach the facts and persuade.

Persuade people to an appropriate response of repentance. We're to call people to repent, to know forgiveness, and that certainty of everlasting life in the new creation.

The only alternative is to be shut out from the presence of this God forever in the torments of hell. We're to persuade, to press that home to people.

Because of Jesus' death and his resurrection, here are the two destinies in front of you. We must show people what they must do by repenting before it's too late, to trust Christ.

Now making that clear, that is part of our message. To fail, to seek, to strive, to persuade, to plead with people about their response to the death and resurrection of Jesus, that's to fail to do what Jesus says here, isn't it?

[12 : 07] If we just stop at saying, here's what's happened, but don't press for a response, that we're not doing what Jesus says here. We're to be witnesses of his death and resurrection and the response to repent and seek forgiveness.

Now we do that, that is our task, because they must respond, but also because we love them. Out of love, we plead with folk to repent, to hear the warning, to hear the invitation of eternal life to respond to the gospel message.

And let's be sure that we give the big Bible picture of God's gospel message. Yes, the epicenter of the gospel is the death, the resurrection of Jesus, but let's remember not only what the gospel saves us from, but what it saves us for.

We rightly shy away and warn against what you might call the prosperity gospel. We had a good example out this one, didn't we? The health and wealth gospel, which preaches a message of health and wealth now, today.

And that is a devious and dangerous message. But there is a sense in which the gospel is a health and wealth gospel.

[13 : 37] Don't misunderstand me, hear me out. It's all about timings and expectations. Turn to the start of Acts, which we read a bit earlier, Acts chapter 1, and just look down to verse 6.

So here's Jesus with the disciples and they're just exploring what it is exactly they're being asked to do in terms of this great task of witnessing. And we see here great clarity about Jesus' timescale, his agenda, what it is and what it isn't.

Jesus gives us the right perspective on his kingdom and what we can expect to come. And the disciples are wrestling with this question, are we to expect God's restored kingdom now?

And the answer is no. The task of the church is not to build the restored kingdom now, but it is the task of the church to proclaim the kingdom.

Just look again at the apostles' question there in verse 6 and Jesus' response. They ask him, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? That's a fair question, isn't it?

[14 : 47] They've seen all that God has done. They've seen all that Jesus has done. They remember the promises of the Old Testament. They were expecting a real king over a real kingdom in a real world.

And so they wondered, is that going to happen now? And Jesus' response, he doesn't blow them out of the water, does he? He says, no. In effect, he says, not yet.

Not yet. He gives them the right perspective. He says, it's not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. With Jesus' ascension, with his return to the right hand of the Father, it's only beginning.

It's not yet completed. It will only be completed when he returns, when he comes again. Look at verse 11. The angels, they say to the disciples, why are you looking into heaven?

This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven. He is going to return. In the same way that you've seen him go, he will come back.

[15 : 56] And he hasn't yet returned, has he? We're still waiting. So Jesus says, you're not to worry yourself about the complete and final restoration of God's kingdom.

That's not for now. It's coming. But that's not your concern now. What your concern is now is proclaiming God's kingdom. Proclaiming the events of his death and resurrection.

Proclaiming the need to repent and turn to him for forgiveness. That's what he says, isn't it, there in verse 8. He says, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and going out to the ends of the earth.

Now that is the same age that we still live in. We are not yet living the verse 11 days. That'll be a great day when Jesus returns. But we're not there yet.

We're still in the Acts 1, 8 days. We're still witnessing to the ends of the earth. We still have that same task today of being his witnesses.

[17 : 03] So we're not yet talking about restoration, but rather we're about proclamation. We're not about restoration. Because that will only happen when Jesus returns.

Only then will there be a new heaven and a new earth. Only then will you and I have resurrection bodies. Only then will every tear be dried.

Only then will we be free from sickness and death. death. So our task now, today, is witnessing to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Testifying to those historical facts of his death and resurrection. Talking about his return. He is coming back. and pressing home the response to those things.

So, we've got to witness with the right perspective. And that means we don't promise too much now. We don't over promise.

[18 : 05] We don't promise the sorts of things that will only be true when Christ returns. So we don't promise healings now. We don't promise freedom from sickness now.

We don't promise health and wealth now. Those promises, they hold great power, don't they? We want them. It's what our itching ears want to hear. And in a sense, those are right desires, aren't they?

Who doesn't want comfort and freedom from pain? But the thing is, Jesus doesn't promise those things yet. Yes, one day, we will be with him in the restored world, a new Eden, a new creation.

Our hearts long for that. But it's not yet. So we don't promise too much now. But we also don't promise too little for the future.

By being careful sometimes not to promise too much now, we undersell what's coming. There is a great and wonderful future that awaits for all who've trusted in Jesus. It's a real future.

[19 : 15] It's a guaranteed future because of Christ's resurrection. It will be fully consummated when he returns. Verse 11 of Acts 1. When he comes back, we'll see that.

We'll enjoy that. So we're not to promise less than the Bible does. Just listen to these words from the end of Revelation.

Here is what's coming. Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. For the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and the sea was no more.

And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man.

He will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will be with them as their God. He'll wipe away every tear from their eyes and death shall be no more.

[20 : 20] Neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more for the former things have passed away. That is a wonderful future.

And we should proclaim that but with the right perspective. Not yet but one day. That is our future. We have a wonderful gospel, friends.

What we're saved from and what we're saved for. A glorious message we have to share. A huge vision of what God is doing through Jesus what will be one day when he returns.

But it's an urgent message isn't it? Heaven and hell are real. We are eternal beings and our life here is so brief and fragile.

The only safe refuge for eternity is in Christ. and it depends on how people now respond to the factual events of history to Jesus' death his resurrection.

[21 : 31] And so we preach we persuade that we might win people to Christ. Well that's something of the what. That is our message.

Our message. But how? How are we to witness? Well firstly we witness together. We witness together.

Let me encourage you. Our evangelism our witness is not primarily a solo sport. Primarily God is with us.

We were singing just before I came up about God sending his spirit with us living in us to help us. we are never alone. He is always with us and helping us.

He is equipping us by his spirit to be his witnesses to the end of the earth. We are never alone. And in addition to that he gives us one another.

[22 : 31] We are not solo Christians we are part of a gathered church. Now yes the Lord does sometimes give to his church what you might call evangelists.

unique individuals hugely gifted the Billy Grahams the John Chapmans of this world. In the UK today you might think of Roger Carswell or Michael Otts or Glenn Scrivener uniquely gifted individuals but they are just that they are unique and we are not called to be like them.

Some might be but that's pretty unusual. Evangelism is very much a team sport. The you in Luke 24 is plural it's yours.

You as God's church you are to go and do this. It's not a single sport. It's not an individual activity. It's something we are called to do together. As a church we witness together to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

So each of us each of us is uniquely gifted. some of you will be able to sit down with somebody and answer their questions about the faith.

[23 : 46] That won't bother you at all. You can do that. Many of us will be able to sit down with somebody and use the word one to one. Open up John's gospel. I think the way they communicate it's so helpful.

They say we may not all be Bible teachers but we can all be Bible sharers. We can be page turners showing people John's gospel walking them through it. But even that's not an individual endeavor is it?

Others will be praying offering support. Others of us will be particularly good inviters but they invite to church and somebody else is at the door to welcome.

We've got folk who are playing music somebody else is preaching. It's a team sport. We're all doing it together. We together as we gather and as we go out into the world we are witnessing together to the gospel.

It's not all down to you or to me. I'm not the person responsible for all the evangelism in this church. It would be a bit of a disaster if that was true. No, we are all called to be local missionaries wherever we are placed.

[25 : 00] Together we all play a role. Just think about your own story for a moment. If you're a Christian here this evening think about how you came to salvation to know the Lord Jesus.

In all likelihood it wasn't down to one individual was it? Now one person may have been particularly significant but usually it's a whole group of people together that were helpful for you in seeing you come to faith.

For me it was several older guys that I got to know over time. It was sitting under God's word for many years week by week. It was reading good books recommended to me. It was a whole church really.

It wasn't just one individual. It was a whole church that played their part. Just think of the key folk for you who were helping you as you came to faith.

Likely it took a whole church. All sorts of people. So it's not all down to you. We can often think about evangelism as being what I must do but actually we're in it together.

[26 : 09] It's a team sport. We can all at least be invited so we can invite people along to church. As we were hearing last Sunday evening it is here as the church gathers that God particularly delights to presence himself.

He is really here. Jesus is the evangelist in his church. It's not down to you or me. It's the Lord Jesus himself who will be at work drawing people to himself.

So we can invite to church to the life course to Christianity Explored and so on but you don't need to have all the answers. It's not all down to you or me.

The church together witnesses to the truth about Jesus. That's the first thing in terms of how we are to witness. Of course we witness ourselves but it really is a corporate activity.

It's something we do together. The second thing to say about how we witness is that we witness with our speech and with our lives.

[27 : 20] It's what we say but also what we do. Now we are to speak. That is absolutely essential isn't it? Jesus commanded to his disciples that they would go into the world and be his witnesses to the facts of his death and resurrection to plead people to respond.

Now that involves speaking using words telling people the gospel the good news a proclamation of victory in battle. it means saying something.

And when you think about your individual encounter with people out there in the world it doesn't mean that you somehow have to get across a complete gospel presentation every time somebody asks you something about church.

Now sometimes somebody may ask you so how did you become a Christian? And so you can tell them your story. Perhaps you won't get that much of an opportunity you get to say something but maybe not quite an open door like that.

But when you do get those opportunities when you are able to tell your story you can do so in such a way that communicates the essential facts of the gospel.

[28 : 39] So part of our job is to be ready to have thought about what we might say before it comes along. Think about how you might answer that sort of question.

Have in your mind a sort of mental framework which you can recall and use. Something like two ways to live is a useful gospel outline.

Try and get some of the key things in your mind. Or another sort of outline would be this God made it we broke it Jesus fixes it.

Now it's not that you slavishly recite those things but just have it in your mind so you've got a rough idea of where you're going. If somebody asks you what is the Christian faith about?

How did you become a Christian? You've got some idea of where you're going to go what you're going to say. Pray. Pray for opportunities to talk about Jesus and your faith.

[29 : 37] Pray for fertile soil in the hearts and minds of those that we speak to. It may be you only get a brief moment to talk about your faith or about what happened at church on Sunday.

Let's use those moments. Plant ideas in people's minds so you can come back to them. Maybe you've got colleagues like I did who over years nothing happened but just little things said along the way.

Suddenly it crops so sometimes we must be patient but take those moments those opportunities when they come. So what we say it is important isn't it but it's not just that it's not just what we say we witness with our words and we witness with our lives.

John Chapman who is no longer alive is with the Lord an Australian evangelist and I was listening to a great set of talks he gave on evangelism and he says that so often in our witness the key is our own Christian lives our own godly living.

He said that for so many folk who profess faith in Christ it is because they first came into contact with a godly life. People do notice a difference in Christians.

[31 : 06] He says there's no way around it. Godly living is key. It's interesting he says in this talk that almost every testimony that he heard and I imagine he heard quite a few doing his job but almost everyone he heard every story of people coming to faith they had this one thing in common.

the person showing the testimony had either Christian parents or godly friends whose lifestyle whose Christian lifestyle was just utterly compelling in almost every case that was a consistent theme through those testimonies a godly life.

People as they watch how you live they want to know what lies behind it. What's behind how you live?

You see a godly life not a perfect one a godly life is a deeply attractive thing. People will be willing to listen to what comes from your lips because of your lives.

Even unbelievers recognize this. I saw a fascinating interview conducted by Glenn Scrivener just last week. He was interviewing Douglas Murray who would probably describe himself as a Christian atheist.

[32 : 36] He's not a believer but he's open to it. But he said at the end of the interview when speaking about faith and particularly the mission of the church he said this even as somebody does not yet profess faith he said the most important thing for Christians is living by example because he said that is how most people are drawn to faith.

He said that he himself has seen extraordinary Christians doing extraordinary things and he finds it compelling. Now that's a non-believer he can recognize that reality but how we live the way we live in front of people will be compelling as people see your transformed lives as they experience kindness at your hands they will more readily hear the words you speak words of truth and life James Philip speaking about this particular point he says what will convince men about the gospel is not bare doctrine but the fact it works seeing it working in somebody's life is so compelling and that's true isn't it each of us in our lives are living demonstration that the gospel works that it transforms now you may not feel that often you may feel like you're a lousy

Christian but if you are one of God's children if you belong to him then you will stand out we're not capable of being perfect so don't have that as your bar we're called to be faithful and that will stand out like a sore thumb in the world and people will look and see and want to know what's going on I think back to a crucial year in my own life I took a year out between school and university and there was the witness the example of two men they were both a few years older than me that convinced me seeing them how they lived it convinced me not only to take the Bible seriously but that there was something life changing in its pages there was something here that I wanted and it's because of how they lived it wasn't just what they said although that was important that was key I looked at the way they lived the way they treated their possessions the way they went out of their way for other people including me and I wanted to know the

God of their lives I wanted to know who they served it was compelling and I thank God for them see each of us through our lips and our lives are able to commend the gospel often it's in the very ordinary day-to-day slog we don't feel particularly special but it's those ordinary acts of kindness of human decency of goodness that we're able to express to others perhaps no other Christian reaches the people that you do we are unique ambassadors to Christ in the places that we study and live and work perhaps you're the only Christian they know they will see your life and there may come a point where they are asking why what is it about you tell me and there's a way in to tell them about the gospel so we witness with our lives but we also of course witness with our lips so that's the what and the how there's a lot more we could say but those are just some things to think about the what and the how but now crucially the why why are we to witness it's often hard isn't it witnessing evangelism can be tough but why are we called to do it that's the most important question which is why we're finishing with it why do we witness we know we ought to we hear it said enough but if we can't answer the why then we'll maybe give it a go for a while but the enthusiasm will fade why witness why is

God asking us telling us to evangelize what's the motivation well three C's as we close three C's first Christ's glory Christ's glory we do it for Jesus we do it for God a week or two ago Willie quoted from the start of John Piper's book on mission and he makes the point there that mission exists witness exists because worship doesn't you see God is due our worship and honor he deserves it but so many don't give it to him so many do not worship and honor him as he is due and that ought to grieve us do you grieve the fact that Jesus is not worshiped as he ought to be do you grieve the fact that people ignore him and mock him and live as they please do you grieve it that he is not honored and worshiped as he deserves he is the one who brought the universe into being he reigns at this very moment and he will return one day as king he gives you and

[38 : 48] I every breath we owe everything to him and as believers our desire must be mustn't it that Jesus has given glory and honor as he deserves and that happens he is glorified and honored when people recognize who he is and turn to him and worship him it's a glorious vision isn't it of Philippians that Willie read at the start of the service therefore God has exalted Jesus and bestowed on him the name that is above every name so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father we long to see Jesus glorified we long to see him worshipped as he ought to be you see worship worship of

Jesus is the fuel for our evangelism it's the goal of our evangelism we do it so that he will be glorified we evangelize we witness so that more and more people will give their lives to Jesus and glorify him that's why we do it it's about him and his glory John Piper again he says worship is ultimate not missions because God is ultimate not man when this age is over and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God missions will be no more it is a temporary necessity but worship abides forever that's our first great motivation Christ's glory that's why we do it second

C compassion compassion for the lost there are lives at stake we are called to love people and the greatest way we can love them is to share the gospel for their eternal good that is why we remind each other to be praying for our friends and our families our 3-1-1 prayer pray for three people just once a week for a minute just lift our eyes beyond our current concerns and think about eternity and Christ's glory and our friends eternal destiny pray for them pray for their eternal salvation that's why we put big efforts into the courses and events we run the life course week two tonight give thanks to the 25 people who came last week that's why we follow up with

Christianity explored in two weeks that's why we want to come to disciples explored after that to keep coming to know the Lord to repent and grow in him that's why put all that effort into those things because we love the lost we want to see them saved we want people to come and hear for themselves about Jesus there is more to life than what we see with our eyes there is an eternity and only two destinations and the most loving thing that we can do that you can do that I can do is attend to people's eternal salvation their eternal well-being that is true compassion which of course does not mean that we don't attend to people's immediate needs of course we do but we don't stop there eternity eternity is just over the horizon are we preparing people for that so we witness because of

Christ's glory we witness for compassion but also we witness because we are commanded Jesus commands us to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth to be a Christian is to witness it's not a choice it is to be a disciple maker that is what we're called to as Christians we're commanders so let's get to it let's do it Jesus our Lord we obey him he commands us to go and make disciples and be it's hard we know that but it's a great privilege and it is worth it what a privilege to know that on that great day when Christ comes to claim his bride with a vast multitude crowded around his throne and there with us are people that we've known people who have come to faith through the witness of the

[44 : 03] Tron church what a great thing that will be it will all have been worth it to see those crowd around his throne on that great day worshipping him what we have in the gospel of Jesus Christ is the best news it's far better than a cure should it arise to COVID we have a cure that brings eternal life and so our passion our mission as a church is to witness to Jesus we do it because we care for Christ's glory we do it because we have real compassion for people and we do it because Jesus has commanded us to let's pray shortly before we finish with our final hymn father god we do thank you for the great gospel of the lord jesus christ who through his death and resurrection calls even people like us to know him to be included in his eternal family what a privilege and so would you help us each of us together to share that wonderful news to share it with our city indeed to the end of the earth so that many more people would turn and give christ the glory he deserves so lord please help us strengthen us by your spirit for this task for we ask it in jesus name amen