

The Witness of the Church

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[0 : 0 0] We're going to turn now to our Bibles, and we're reading this morning in two places. I want you to turn up the very last chapter of Luke's Gospel, that's page 885 in the Church Bibles.

And then if you can also turn on a few pages to the beginning of the book of Acts, page 909, and we're going to read a few verses from there also.

Acts, of course, is the continuation of Luke's writing. It's not immediately obvious in our Bibles because John's Gospel has got in between, but Luke 24 ends in Acts chapter 1 begins as part of an unbroken story.

And I wanted us just to see that this morning as we come to the end of our studies in Luke's Gospel. So reading at Luke chapter 24 and verse 44, the risen Lord Jesus in the evening of that first day, remember last week we looked at the morning, the afternoon, and the evening, the three parts of that great day that Luke records for us.

And these are the Lord's words to his disciples. Then he said to them, These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms, that's the whole Old Testament, must be fulfilled.

[1 : 1 6] Then 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 and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

You are witnesses to 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.

Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy and were continually in the temple, blessing God.

Turn over then to Acts chapter 1, and we have a slightly fuller account of just that, what Luke telescopes into that little last paragraph about the ascension of Jesus.

In the first book, O Theophilus, I have 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.

[2 : 3 0] To them he presented himself alive, after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty 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.

For John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now. So when they had 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 ends of the earth. And when he said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up and a cloud took him 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.

[3 : 48] Amen. And may God bless to us this, his word. Well, if you would turn with me to that very last little portion of Luke's gospel, chapter 24, verses 44 to 53, and page 885.

We come at last to the end of this present study in Luke's gospel. And I've certainly been living under Luke's tutelage for over a year now, on and off as we've spent time in this gospel, coming back to it, and so on.

And I suppose I'm rather feeling now that I wish Luke had written a few more chapters because I'm rather going to miss him. And more and more, I can say, I do thank God for this physician whose pen has surely brought more health and healing to the world than any pills that he might once have prescribed.

And by the way, that ought to be an encouragement, oughtn't it, to any physicians, any doctors here, any doctors in training, to remember that, as the collect in the Book of Common Prayer for the Feast of St. Luke puts it, that wholesome medicine of the doctrine delivered by him is in fact the greatest medicine that any of you will ever be able to dispense alongside the pills and potions and everything else.

And how greatly our world needs that healing. Well, we're coming to the end of the present study, and I want today, by way of a kind of epilogue, to remind us of Luke's whole purpose in writing.

[5 : 23] Because unless we've grasped that, then all of our study has really been in vain. Because Luke has not written this gospel that we might enjoy some stories and sermons and then just forget it and get on with our life as before.

No, time and again, we've heard all through Luke's gospel a call to action. The gospel word of John the Baptist, remember, was a call to bear fruit in keeping with repentance.

The call of Jesus, again and again, is hear my words and do them. To hear the word, to hold it fast in an honest and good heart and bear fruit with patience.

And Luke's whole book is written, as he tells us himself, that we might have certainty in what we believe so that we will go on having confidence in what God has called us to do.

I wonder if anyone can remember what I called Luke's theme and aim sentence right back at the beginning of our studies. I said that Luke was a historian and an apologist and an evangelist.

[6 : 29] And so he sets out to document, to defend and to declare the good news of Jesus the Savior, both fulfilled in earth in person, that's Luke, and from heaven by his spirit, that's the book of Acts, so that it continues to be believed in and declared to all nations until Jesus returns.

That's why Luke is writing. Luke wants us to have complete certainty about the mission of Christ so that we can have complete confidence in the mission of the church.

And that's why it's crucial to remember that at the end of this gospel, we are not at the end of Luke's writing. It goes right on, as we saw, into volume two in the book of Acts. Nor is it the end of the mission of Christ.

Far from it. Luke's great theme is our certain salvation. And his gospel begins, doesn't it, with salvation announced to Israel with their Savior, who is long promised about to come.

But it ends at the very end of the book of Acts with that great salvation being proclaimed to the whole world. This salvation, says Paul, God has sent to the Gentiles.

[7 : 51] And Paul is in Rome, at the very center of the world. And we're told he's proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness unhindered.

The mission goes on into all the world. And just as the Son of God came down from heaven into this world bringing the message of salvation, so now the people of Christ are sent out into the world bearing this same message.

And, crucially, they are endued with the same power of God to do what for man, of course, is quite impossible to bring saving light into a dark world.

Do you remember in Luke chapter 1, it was the Holy Spirit whom Gabriel said to Mary would come down and descend upon her so that the power of the Most High would overshadow her in order to bring about that miraculous birth that brought the Son of God in human flesh into the world.

And it will be the same Holy Spirit whom Jesus promised in Luke 11 that the Father will give to all who ask Him. It will be the same Holy Spirit who comes down upon the whole church to empower them for this great saving mission into a dark and ignorant and hostile world.

[9 : 13] For nothing shall be impossible with God. And so you see these two books of Luke which begin and end and are shot all the way through with the story of salvation come from heaven into this world.

They have as a pivot point if you like, as the hinge that binds together the ministry of Christ and the mission of the church. The pivot point is the ascension of Christ into heaven which results in the descent of what Luke calls here in verse 49 the power from on high.

The Holy Spirit who comes to empower the church's earthly mission just as He empowered the earthly mission of Christ Himself. Now that is so, so important for Luke.

Luke, do you remember I said, of all the evangelists is the great theologian of the Holy Spirit. And His gospel ends here just as it began. Notice in verse 53 in the temple in Jerusalem with words of promise about the filling of the Holy Spirit.

Do you remember how the gospel began? Way back in chapter 1 Zechariah was in the temple and he's being told, isn't he, about his son John who will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb.

[10 : 33] And here that's the same promise to all the promise of the Father, the power from on high. Which as we read in Acts chapter 1 he repeatedly calls the baptism of the Holy Spirit who will empower the church for witness to the world.

And where Zechariah, do you remember, was silenced because of his unbelief, here the disciples' tongues are loosed through their belief in the risen Lord. And they are the new and true temple and they are about to carry the dwelling place of God himself into all the nations through the preaching of Jesus Christ.

And so here is Luke's critical point that he absolutely wants us to grasp. That he who came down from on high in power to bring the Savior into the world in the ministry of Christ, that is the Holy Spirit of God himself, he will likewise come down in power to bring salvation to the whole world through the mission of the church.

And of that, says Luke, we are to be absolutely certain so that we can go on with confidence believing in and declaring the gospel of Jesus Christ until he returns as he's promised to do.

And we can do it through every danger and toil and snare, through every apparent defeat, because, well, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in history vindicates all the promises of Scripture, both those that are already fulfilled and those that are still to be accomplished.

[12 : 16] And so we can go on with our task knowing that the power of God which overcame every obstacle and opposition and foe in the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ shall not fail to overcome every obstacle and foe and will fulfill the mission of his church.

And that means that we need never falter or give up or doubt that Jesus Christ will build his church and the very gates of hell themselves will never prevail against it.

Not now, not ever. And even when the task seems absolutely impossible to us, we must remember nothing is impossible with God.

That's the message all through Luke's writing. Both here in Luke and all through the Acts of the Apostles. But it's so very clearly summarized right here in this last little paragraph of chapter 24 that I want us to focus here today so that we also are absolutely clear about the certainty we have in what the Bible tells us about everything that matters in time and eternity centered as everything is in the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ so that we'll be confident in what God has called us to do to keep on believing and to keep on declaring the good news of Jesus Christ until he returns.

So first, I want us to notice this morning that the historical witness to the resurrection of Christ means that we can be certain about the work of Christ.

[13 : 58] Look at verse 44. The risen Lord again, and it's the third time in this chapter, he says, everything written about him in the scriptures must be fulfilled.

And then he opened their mind to understand what is in the scriptures, verse 46, that the Christ must suffer and on the third day rise from the dead. and the resurrection proves that that promise of the scripture has been fulfilled in the person of the Savior.

We can be certain that the work of Christ as promised is accomplished. It's been fulfilled despite all opposition of men as we've seen, of demons, of Satan himself.

Despite even the apparent utter defeat of Israel rejecting their own Messiah and of Christ's death on the cross as a criminal. where man plotted only evil but God's eternal purpose of a good for the saving of many lives was being worked out perfectly all according to plan through the obedience, through the absolute faithfulness to the very last of the human flesh of the Son of God himself.

But how did that happen? how did Jesus prevail against all these odds? How did he resist every assault of Satan?

[15 : 26] Every temptation to assert his power as the Son of God and not to submit himself to God as the Son of Man? Even in the Garden of Gethsemane in agony where he sweated and prayed in the full knowledge of that horror of judgment that awaited.

And when he prayed, Father, take this cup from me and yet prayed not my will but thine. And on the cross where he was assaulted from every angle and taunted to come down and could have come down and saved himself.

But instead, as Hebrews 9 verse 14 says, through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God to purify our consciences from dead works to serve the living God.

How did he prevail the perfect human Son of God on earth? Well, did you hear what that verse in Hebrews said?

He offered himself without blemish to God the perfect obedience of this new Adam through the eternal Spirit.

[16 : 38] And that's what Luke has taught us right from the very start of his Gospel. The promise of the Scriptures had been fulfilled in the person of the Savior through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The words of Scripture must be fulfilled because they're not mere human words. They are the words of the power from on high. They're the words of God himself written by his Spirit. And as Acts 1.16 says, the Scriptures had to be fulfilled which the Spirit spoke beforehand.

The words of the Spirit cannot help but come to pass through the work of the Spirit. And that's what Luke has shown us all the way through from the start of his Gospel.

Turn back just to chapter 1 of Luke's Gospel to see because I want you to remember. See how Luke's story rings with the chimes of fulfillment from the language of the prophets who longed for the day when the Spirit of God would at last be at work to bring about the blessing of God to bring salvation to the world.

You think of the prophets Isaiah chapter 32. The prophet announces that one day a king will reign in righteousness. But he says until that day there will be desolate blight in the world until the day when the Spirit is poured out from on high.

[18 : 02] Only then at last will the king reign in righteousness and there will be peace and security for his people forever. Well look at Luke chapter 1. What is he telling us?

Look what we see. It's full of the wonders of the power of the Holy Spirit come down from on high to announce salvation. Chapter 1 verse 15 John the Baptist will be born and he'll be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb.

Verse 35 in Jesus' conception the Holy Spirit will come down upon Mary to bring about this miracle birth. verse 41 Elizabeth when she hears about it is filled with the Holy Spirit and then at last even Zechariah himself in verse 67 he speaks the words of the Holy Spirit about this wonderful salvation and notice again verse 77 salvation in the forgiveness of sins because of the tender mercy of our God whereby the sunrise shall visit us from where?

From on high the power from on high look over to chapter 2 verse 26 Simeon is told by the Holy Spirit about Jesus he's led by the Holy Spirit into the temple to meet Jesus look at chapter 3 verse 16 John speaks about the Christ who will do what?

Baptize with the Holy Spirit and then you see crucially in chapter 3 verse 22 the Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus from on high to empower him for his earthly ministry and mission in chapter 4 verse 1 full of the Holy Spirit he's led immediately into the desert to do battle with Satan and verse 14 he returns to Galilee in the power of the Spirit and in verse 18 he announces the beginning of his ministry he quotes these words from Isaiah chapter 61 the Spirit of the Lord is upon me to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor at last the year of jubilee of forgiveness the year of salvation do you see?

[20 : 09] the power of the Holy Spirit from on high is the power of the ministry of Jesus Christ from the very beginning and all through chapter 10 verse 21 Jesus we're told rejoiced in the Holy Spirit when he saw Satan fall from heaven anticipating the victory that he was going to accomplish and he rejoices that the power of God for revelation has come down from heaven through the sun to bring this great redemption to his people and so you see obedient to the very end led by the Holy Spirit in his power says Hebrews 9 he offered himself without blemish to God to God and then as Paul tells us in 1st Timothy chapter 2 he was vindicated by the Holy Spirit in his resurrection it was through the Holy Spirit's power also that Jesus was raised from the grave

Paul tells us in Romans 8 it had to happen all of this because what the Holy Spirit promised what he declares in scripture he delivers in history and the resurrection of Jesus therefore means that we can be certain about the work of Jesus Christ that the promise of the scriptures has been fulfilled in the person of the Savior it all had to be because as Luke 24 verse 46 says it is written the scriptures had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand because what the Spirit declares he delivers but now look at the very next words in verse 47 what is also written and must happen is that repentance and forgiveness of sins will be proclaimed in his name to all nations now do you see what Jesus is saying just as we can be certain about the fulfillment of the work of Christ so also secondly we can be certain about the witness of the church the promise of the scriptures will be fulfilled in the proclamation of salvation through the same power through the

Holy Spirit's power through the church and just as the resurrection of Jesus gives us assurance gives us certainty that salvation has been accomplished through the work of Christ on the cross so also the resurrection assures us it gives certainty that this salvation will be applied to the people of all the nations of this earth through the witness of the church of Jesus Christ in the world you he says my followers are my witnesses of these things and you are the ones who will accomplish this and it must be so why because it is written now it seems so unlikely doesn't it in fact it seems impossible how can mere human beings possibly fulfill this commission when even the first disciples even the most privileged followers of

Jesus were so utterly feeble and foolish and such failures every one of them deserted him at the cross how can they do this and remember how difficult the task will be Jesus himself said back in chapter 18 didn't he when he was faced with the rich ruler how difficult it is for so many to enter the kingdom of God when they're so taken up with this world's wealth and concerns and the disciples said well who can be saved and Jesus said you remember it's impossible with man it's impossible with man but what is impossible with man is possible with God that's just what the angel said to Mary back in chapter 1 do you remember and yes this task of world mission is impossible for man but look at verse 49 behold I am sending upon you the promise of my father the power from on high the power of the

Holy Spirit of God himself and if you flick over just quickly to what we read there in Acts chapter 1 you'll see how Luke fleshes out what he summarizes at the end of the gospel so very clearly notice verse 2 by the way all Jesus teaching until he ascended do you see was through the Holy Spirit also and notice verse 4 he says to the disciples don't depart on your mission yet you can't do this yourselves you have to wait you have to wait for the promise of the Father the Holy Spirit is coming soon because Jesus is about to ascend and verse 8 you will receive power from the Holy Spirit what for for your mission to the very ends of the earth it must happen and it will happen as it is written through the power of the same Holy Spirit who led Jesus from the beginning who raised Jesus from the dead having led him all the way on the road to the cross in obedience even to death and Jesus says this is what is written and it is all through the Old

[26 : 08] Testament nowhere clearer perhaps than in the great prophet Isaiah if you look later on this afternoon in the middle chapters of Isaiah from about chapter 42 onwards you'll see there that that Jesus God speaks a lot about Israel as his servant nation called to be witnesses to all the nations of God's saving righteousness but he tells how Israel failed so utterly in the task and yet God promises a true servant at last who would be filled with his spirit who would accomplish all that Israel failed to do and through him also Israel will be redeemed and God's people will be renewed and the Lord says in that great day he will pour out his spirit on your offspring and they will be witnesses to declare God's praises to the nations and in Isaiah 61 the words that Jesus quotes of himself as we read at the beginning of

Luke chapter 4 in his ministry the spirit of the Lord is upon me says the servant but he goes on to say and you my people renewed shall be called the priests of the Lord and the ministers of our God among all the nations and that is what will result ultimately at last in the fulfillment of all his promises and the consummation of his kingdom and the new heavens and the new earth full of everlasting glory and peace now you see the disciples knew all of that they know the scriptures and so when Jesus speaks here in Acts chapter 1 to them about being witnesses about the age of the Holy Spirit and the gospel going to all nations they say to him in chapter 1 verse 6 they say to him will you at this time then restore the kingdom to Israel is this going to be the final culmination of all your glory and what does Jesus say it's not for you to know the timetable of God's glorious kingdom but it is for you to have the task of the kingdom of God verse 8 the task of witness to the ends of the earth in the power of the

Holy Spirit and you can be certain that that witness will not fail not ever because it is written the promise of the scriptures will be fulfilled through the proclamation of the church in the power of the Spirit what do we see unfolding all through the book of Acts from the very beginning of the day of Pentecost when the Spirit came from on high he gave them utterance to proclaim the gospel of saving power and always the sign of the Spirit's presence is the proclamation of the gospel of Christ because the Spirit came for witness and that means that the hallmark of the presence of the Holy Spirit in power in the church is always always that there is powerful proclamation of the word of God and there is clarity about the message of the scriptures being made known and there is understanding and real repentance and faith and fruitful service the mark of the

Holy Spirit in the church is never chaos and confusion and the submerging of the message of scriptures and a lot of noise and nonsense not ever that's what we see all the way through the book of Acts to the very end the very last verse proclamation of the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ without hindrance and you see we can be certain says Luke about the fulfillment of the witness of the church just as we can be certain about the fulfillment of the work of Jesus Christ the work of Christ was brought to completion despite all opposition of man and Satan through the power of the Holy Spirit from on high and the witness of the church will be brought to completion despite all opposition of man and Satan through that same power of the Holy Spirit from on high that's what Luke's messages in these verses and so friends what that means for us today is that we can be confident about this word of the cross and about the way of the cross even though to our world our message is so weak and feeble and and the messengers are so often weak and feeble we can be confident in the word that we proclaim and in the way that we pursue look again at

Luke 24 verse 47 what is this word that's to be proclaimed that will convert and challenge and change the world it is a gospel says Jesus of repentance and forgiveness of sins in Jesus name alone for all nations and cultures do you see now that is a message which seems weak and worthless to our world but look at it first Jesus reminds us what salvation really is it is about peace with God which comes only through forgiveness of sins and all through Luke from the start that is what the gospel is about not about health and healing and wealth and so on in this world not about political nirvana or social revolution or justice the kingdom is not coming that way Jesus repeatedly says no as Zechariah sang back in chapter 1 and we began our service with Jesus came to give the knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins to guide our feet into the path of peace that's the peace that the angels sang about to the shepherds the peace on earth with those whom God has favored because he has turned away his wrath and anger against their sins because of his tender mercy your sins are forgiven go in peace as Jesus repeated word to those who believe and trust in him and Luke is clearly showing us in his gospel that whatever people think they need most in life whether it's wholeness of body or mind or rescue from poverty or from loneliness or oppression or want whatever it is whatever people think their real greatest need that eclipses all these other needs is the need for forgiveness for their sins and that alone is what brings real peace lasting peace peace with

[33 : 11] God that rescues from the darkness and the dread of death itself and so friends we can be certain because Jesus tells us that that need is the greatest need of every living person in every nation and so we can be confident that it's proclaiming this gospel about forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ that is the answer to the greatest needs of this world and no other gospel is the answer we can be confident that proclaiming this gospel alone is what will fulfill the witness of the church until Christ comes and no other but notice Jesus also is very clear here who this gospel is for it is for all the nations beginning at Jerusalem that is it's for Jew and Gentile it's for black and white it's for east and west it's for north and south it's for the whole world in other words it is an inclusive gospel but not in the way our world wants inclusiveness

God shows no partiality says Peter in Acts chapter 10 but what that means is all people everywhere must fear him and they must do what he says is right that is they must bow the knee to Jesus Christ regardless of their religious background or their culture or their creed and that means friends that the church can be certain that this gospel must be preached to every nation on earth and that we must seek to convert Jews and Hindus and Muslims and secular and atheists and everybody else and we can be confident that this is the power of the Holy Spirit and this is what he will do in fulfilling the witness of the church and we must never be ashamed of that that is our mission and no other but how wonderful that knowledge is God shows no partiality all kinds of people can be saved and all kinds of people will be saved and Luke shows us that doesn't he repeatedly through his gospel

Samaritans Gentiles women the poor the rich beggars and barristers even a thief dying on the cross indeed all who come to realize their need for a savior because notice also in verse 47 Jesus is clear about how salvation is found it is found only through repentance through turning to God in penitent faith repent and turn again that your sins may be blotted out that was Peter's word in Acts chapter 3 you see it is also an exclusive message which of course is also very offensive to our world and very offensive to every human heart there must be real repentance and that means there must be real humbling there must be real admission of our wrongdoing of sin and of rebellion that needs

God's forgiveness and it's repentance he says in Jesus name in Jesus name alone you cannot have salvation without that a gospel like that will always be resisted and despised when John the Baptist told King Herod that he must repent that he was a sinner Herod locked John up in prison and then later on he beheaded him and the world still hates that kind of offensive gospel that tells people that you're not pleasing to God and that you must turn that you must submit that you must obey the words of a unique and only savior the world will resist that gospel the world will try to silence that gospel it will scorn it it will mock it relentlessly and so if that really is our message that message will always seem so very weak Paul knew that how foolish it seemed to that great metropolitan culture like Corinth it's folly he says to those who are perishing in 1st

Corinthians 1 but to us who are being saved it is the very power of God and it pleased God he says through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe and Paul preached nothing therefore but this word of the cross Jesus Christ and him crucified and in that great city the church of Jesus Christ was born in demonstration says Paul of the spirit's power we can have confidence in the word of the cross it's the proclamation of this message in all its apparent weakness to the world that though it is despised and rejected of men will fulfill the mission of the church and will impart salvation real peace with God real forgiveness of sins forever to people of every nation on this earth it is written and so it will be we can have certainty and confidence even when sometimes even to our own human ears the message seems so very weak and when the messengers likewise seem so very weak and are so very weak we can have confidence also

[39 : 08] Luke is telling us in the way of the cross for in the way Jesus walked the road to glory and triumph fulfilling his ministry so also we are to walk and thus fulfill our mission to the world we can have confidence in the pattern of Jesus way he knew both joy in the Holy Spirit and the pain of great disappointment and rejection and great division from those who wouldn't have fellowship with the real Christ when it turned out that he was very different from their perception and their desires and Paul says that likewise his ambassadors that's us that we also will be to some people the aroma of life itself but to others we will be the stench of death and if we follow in the Lord's day friends we will share great joy in the advance of the kingdom we will see it touch and change people's lives as they come to love and follow Jesus but we will also know the pain as many resist and loathe the

Lord Jesus Christ but we can be confident Jesus won the world through shame and beckons you his road the pattern of the spirit through whose power he fulfilled Christ's work will be evident wherever the same spirit is fulfilling the church's true witness we can have confidence in the pattern of his way and we can have confidence in the priorities of his way of the cross in all that he taught his disciples as we saw on that road to glory about that road to glory seeking above all things his kingdom and the riches that don't fade and the rewards that don't disappoint when at last we're called to give an account to God his priorities teach us that our father has provided us with a kingdom and that he knows all our earthly needs and he will provide all that we need if we would stop fretting but just first seek his kingdom and all these things will be added to us and so we can be confident in the way of the cross that treasures heavenly things above all earthly things we can be confident when our loved ones perhaps our family our friends our boss our company even our own hearts want us to seek more of this world and its prizes and its approval and its promotions though it is the priorities of the spirit who enabled

Jesus to pray thy will be done not mine that will endue the church's prayers with power to fulfill our task as he fulfilled his so we can have confidence in the priorities of the way of the cross and we can have confidence in the power of the way of the cross because this is true power this is heaven's deepest revelation of power from on high come down to bring light into those in darkness and in the shadow of death it's the power made perfect in weakness from the manger in Bethlehem all the way along the road to Jerusalem in the garden of Gethsemane on the cross itself even in the lifelessness of that corpse in the tomb it is God's power made perfect in weakness the power that fulfilled the promise of the scriptures in the person of the Savior despite all opposition and hatred and rejection and mockery and scorn his power is made perfect in weakness and just as the apparent weakness of the way of the cross triumphed in the work of Christ friends so also will the weakness of the way of the cross triumph in the witness of the church not for us a kingdom advancing through sword and spear and suicide bombs not the hellish power of Muhammad but the heavenly power of the mission of the meekness of Christ that is the power that will fulfill the promise of the scriptures through the proclamation of the scriptures that tell of a savior who walked the way of pain who gave his life for others proclaimed by people who walk also in his way and who are filled with his power a power that is made perfect in weakness as

Paul wrote to the Corinthians that took him to them and to that great city in weakness and in fear and in much trembling and yet a power that resulted in a people who were formerly mired in immorality and vice and idolatry and yet were changed converted transformed forever washed sanctified justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and by the spirit of our God friends we can have certainty and confidence in the witness of the church of our Lord Jesus Christ this gospel will be opposed and we will be opposed but the resurrection of Christ in history gives us certainty that all that is written will be fulfilled including the perfect completion of the mission of the church of Jesus Christ yes there will be dark and difficult days Jesus promised that they will drag you before courts and authorities civil and ecclesiastical but don't be anxious the

Holy Spirit will be with you especially in that very hour and will give you words to say because that will be your opportunity for witness Jesus has promised and the whole Bible has promised so we don't need to fear or falter we can be confident that the church's witness will be fulfilled through the proclamation of the Savior to the world in a gospel message that seems weak inclusive in all the wrong ways exclusive in all the wrong ways repugnant with its talk of repentance and forgiveness forgiveness but it is this word of the cross and this alone which will convert people of every nation in this world that witness will be fulfilled through the power of the Holy Spirit in us and gospel messengers who are so weak but who are likewise called to walk the way of the cross so that all may see as Paul says that salvation rests not in the wisdom of man but in the power of

[46 : 30] God for when we are weak then we are strong and the cross of Christ is not emptied of its power to save so let's heed our teacher Luke and go on witnessing with certainty about our message and with confidence in our method for it is written that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations beginning at Jerusalem let's pray almighty God who called Luke the physician whose praise is in the gospel to be an evangelist and physician of the soul may it please thee that by the wholesome medicine of the doctrine delivered by him all the diseases of our souls may be healed through the merits of thy son Jesus

Christ our Lord Lord Lord bloody this earth holiness Israel hundred and will engage