

In **John 18:37**, Jesus says:

For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—

Now, how do you think he completed that statement? To call sinners? To die as a ransom? He does say those things elsewhere. But not here. Here's what he says:

For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth.

Does that surprise you? What does he mean? Jesus is saying that his purpose in leaving the presence of God the Father and entering into our world is to declare and display what's true. According to Jesus and the testimony of the Bible, there are two types of people: those who know God and those who don't. Jesus is saying He has come to help us know who God really is, what He's really like. He's come to bear witness to the truth. Keep that in mind as we read **Acts 1:4–9**.

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 is 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 had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. (ESV)

What's happening here? In this passage, Jesus is transferring His role as "witness" to his disciples. Now, Jesus is not giving us a new role here but reinstating and empowering a role we were originally created to have. **Genesis 1:26-28** says that all humanity was created "in God's image", that is you are created to declare and display what's true of God. But we rebelled against God. We don't want to be God's witnesses. We want to be God. We want others to bear witness about *our* greatness. We want people to brag about us, to follow us, to imitate us, to like our posts, to share our insights, to make us go viral. We want to show the world how big of a deal we are! So, we hide what is shameful and prop up and exaggerate what is good; afraid we will be found out to be the frauds we know we are. And eventually what we think will make us happy, the approval and praise of others, actually makes us miserable because it enslaves us to their whims.

But God has not given up on us. Through Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit, we are being restored to the role we were created for. Think about it: we love to share good news don't we? The birth of a baby, we get a new job or a raise, a new car or a new house, an engagement announcement...we love to share good news! Why is that? Because God made you that way! And here in **Acts 1**, Jesus is telling us "when the Spirit comes upon you, you will have the power to share the best news: *God saves sinners! The penalty for our sin has been paid by Jesus and there is new life for all who come to Him!* You and I love to share good news because we are made to bear witness to this great news!

Therefore, to deny your role as a witness is to deny who you are made to be. So, this morning, I want each of us to embrace this identity for our lives. **God Empowers Us to Be Witnesses of His Goodness**. My goal this morning is to first show you how God **empowers you to be His witness** from **Acts 1** and then in the second half of our time I want to walk through a way to practically grow in **your effectiveness as a witness**. Are you ready?

A. GOD EMPOWERS OUR WITNESS

Instead of going through this whole passage, I want to look at more at **1:8** and address 2 ways that God empowers us.

1. Ability: How many here would say that you are awkward? "You don't speak good." You want to say something about Jesus but you're sure it's going to come out mumbled or too fast or all mixed up or you'll forget something and say something heretical. But look at **verse 8**. Jesus says they will receive "what"? "**Power when the Holy Spirit comes upon them.**" These 11 men, who knew more than anyone else about Jesus and who more than likely had plenty of ability to talk about him, were commanded to wait until the Spirit came and gave them power. Why? Because we bear witness to Jesus not by our own ability but by the strength and ability of the Holy Spirit.

God delights in using the weak to shame the strong, in using the awkward to embarrass the eloquent. If you are sharing what you know about Jesus by your own strength, no matter how horrible or great you are as a speaker, you will utter empty words. But if you come with the power of the Spirit, you'll have power you could never muster within yourself.

This means that our witness must be rooted in dependency and prayer. Prayer has to be the main work of all of our ministry as a church. This is why we pray every other week at our Men's Group. We know we are insufficient to do the work on our own. We need the God the Spirit to empower us. So, if you know you are going to speak with someone about Jesus, pray before you meet. As you talk with someone and it's clear that the conversation is heading that direction,

mentally ask God for strength and the right words in the moment. Pray, pray, pray for God to help you. Yes, there's great value in learning a gospel presentation to walk through. But power and ability only come from the Spirit. Lean on Him in prayer and dependency as you bear witness. **God Empowers Us to Be Witnesses of His Goodness.**

2. Knowledge: Jesus tells his disciples they will be witnesses. Not scholars, not preachers, not pastors (though those aren't bad)...he says they will be witnesses. That word witness means exactly what it means today at a trial. As a witness, you **testify about what you know**. In fact, it's when you start to speculate on what you don't know that you get in trouble. So, if you are a Christian, testify to what you know and if someone asks you something you don't know, say so. It's ok to say, "That's a great question. I don't know but I'll try and find out for you." Or "Let's find out together..." Humility and honesty are Godly traits, don't run from them.

Just remember, you are testifying about Jesus not yourself. Make sure people know he's the hero not you. So, in your testimony: you're not the hero, Jesus is. It's not about how you picked yourself up but about how Jesus picked you up. Likewise, for those who do know a lot: keep the main thing, the main thing. It's not about how many answers you have but about how Jesus is the ultimate answer. You are testifying about Jesus not yourself. Make sure people know he's the hero, not you. **God Empowers Us to Be Witnesses of His Goodness**

So, when it comes to knowledge, testify to what you know *about Jesus*. But there's another aspect of knowledge. And that's not just knowing what to say but how to say it. And I think it's this part that we get hung up on. Do we use the same exact gospel presentation with everybody we meet? I mean it's one thing to know that your Muslim neighbor and the guy standing on the corner need to trust in Jesus; but it doesn't take long before you realize that you need to adapt how you talk about Jesus to each one. You want to speak in ways they can understand. And then, when do you say it? Do you wait for a prompt? For someone to bring up Jesus or are you constantly looking for a Jesus connection? Like you're watching the game at someone's house and the Chiefs just won, do you just take the opportunity and go: "This was fun, but you see how Mahomes took a knee to end the game and secure the victory, let me tell you about another man who knelt in a garden to secure victory for you and me..." Now that's smooth, right? But in real life, each of us would be stumbling. And all of this brings us to the second part of our time together...

B. GROWING AS EMPOWERED WITNESSES

We can't control the power of the Holy Spirit, but we can grow in our knowledge of the gospel and how to proclaim it. And the more you grow in that knowledge and the better equipped you are to proclaim the gospel, the more effective you can be when the Spirit comes in power. But what knowledge are we growing in? Two things.

1. The Gospel Story: The apostles were to be witnesses of Jesus. They were to show how all of history culminated in his life, death, and resurrection and how this was good news for all. The same is true of us. As Christians, we should grow in our understanding of the gospel story found in the Bible. It can be broken down into 4 parts:

1. **Identity:** We are made in God's image to reflect his glory, to love God, and to love others.
2. **Problem:** We have rebelled against God's rule and our self-rule leads to conflict, slavery, and judgment.
3. **Salvation:** God rescues us from the consequences of our sin by sending his Son to pay the price of our judgment on the cross, raising Him from the dead so we can have new life under His rule again.
4. **Hope:** God will make all things new in this broken world when Jesus returns.

Now, this is really abbreviated. But it's the story of the Bible. And as you grow in your knowledge of Jesus, each of these 4 parts will grow and your understanding of God and yourself will grow and your love for Jesus will grow too. In fact, if you desire to be an effective witness to Jesus, the gospel story must become more real to you everyday. It must be the story you live out, not just information you recite. The gospel story must be good news to you, over and over again.

2. Knowing Others' "Gospel" Stories: The apostles were to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. This means that they would be responsible for communicating the truth of God to people who did not have a Jewish background. In order to do that well, they would have to adapt the way they talked about Jesus so the people could understand (**Acts 17** is a great example of this). Likewise, so will we. How? Where do we start?

First, you must realize that everyone has a story that they believe is good news for them. For instance, it may be that "good news" for someone is that they achieve all the requirements of their religious faith and get to go to paradise

when they die OR that they get to get high as much as they like without dealing with the consequences OR that they have enough money in their life that they never have to stress out about finances OR that they find the love of their life and never have to be single again and can finally start the family they always wanted. Everyone has a gospel story that breaks down in the same categories as the Biblical gospel story:

1. *Identity*: Who I am OR Who I'm meant to be
2. *Problem*: What's preventing me from living out my identity
3. *Salvation*: How I think my problem will be solved
4. *Hope*: What I want to happen once my problem is solved

Our role in being an effective witness for Jesus is to figure out what people's gospel stories are and then proclaim THE gospel story in a way that meets their real needs. How do you do this? Well, if you read how Jesus talks with people *one-on-one* about God (like in **John 4** or **Luke 18** for starters), he rarely just starts off on a big speech. He usually starts off with a question or with an invitation for the other person to open up first. He's opening the door to conversation. If you are going to be a good witness you've got to know the story your friends, family, or neighbors are living. So, what kind of things are you asking about? What answers are you looking for?

1. *Identity*: What's the good desire underneath it all?
 - a. Oftentimes people don't just want sex, they really want love. They don't just want to be high, they want pleasure and joy. They don't just want control, they want peace. All of these are good desires but they are being sought after in sinful ways. So, listen for the reasons underneath all the other reasons.
2. *Problem*: What's the problem in them?
 - a. As you listen to people, most often the problems in their lives have to do with other people or their circumstances. Sure, they may admit some of their faults, but most of their issues are outside of themselves. But what we are told in Scripture is that the greatest problem with us, is us. So, listen for their attitudes and reactions; not just their problems and circumstances.
3. *Salvation*: How is their solution not enough?
 - a. Oftentimes their solution is to do something that will only make the problem worse or it ignores the real problem. For instance, someone who believes that God only rewards the perfectly righteous becomes anxious because they realize they aren't perfect. Their solution may be to buckle down and try harder...but that will only make them more anxious. It feeds the problem. Or it may be to give up and stop trying which leads to more disobedience...which will only make them more anxious down the road. It feeds the problem. They want peace with God but don't know how to find it.
 - b. So, listen for how they hope to make things better and consider how this only feeds the real problem.
4. *Hope*: What do they need to know about God?
 - a. Underneath all of this is a false idea about who God is and what He's done or will do for them. Either they're not considering God at all OR they are holding on to a lie about God. Listen for how they talk about spiritual things or if they talk about spiritual things at all.

How does this flesh out? Let's suppose you are talking with someone who is stressing out. They are upset with someone in their life because they're making bad decisions and those decisions are negatively affecting them. Now, that's a real issue. As you talk with them, they say something like, "If they did what I told them to, then none of this would be happening. From here on out, if they can't take my advice, I'm just going to have to leave them." Let's walk through those 4 questions:

1. *What's the real desire here*: They want to be in control (why) so they can have peace in their life.
2. *What's the problem*: This person, and outside circumstances, are not submitting to my authority.
3. *What's the salvation*: Anyone who challenges my authority will either listen or they will be cut out of my life.
4. *What's the hope*: I will have peace in my life.

Now, this moment of venting becomes a moment to bear witness to the goodness of God. **How is their solution not enough? What do they need to know about God in regards to peace? In regards to authority?** As you wrestle with these things you may find that you can say something like this:

"I can see you are anxious and it's understandable. This is a hard situation. And I even understand why you want to take control of the situation, we all want peace in our lives. But, if I may say so, it seems that you're trying to control things that you can't. We can't control people's responses or reactions and it's not going to work to try and distance ourselves from everyone we can't control, because then we'll end up alone. These situations are where I find myself resting in the sovereignty of God. My faith brings me peace because it tells me that the God who is in control loved me enough to die for me. If Jesus did that for me, he can be trusted with everything else too. I believed he died for you too and can bring you peace in this situation too, if you are willing to trust him."

Now, maybe you won't get to go through the whole thing. Maybe there's more of a dialogue than there is a speech. But regardless, in listening for their gospel story and trying to tie it to THE gospel story, you are able to connect Jesus to their deepest desires; the desires God gave them when he created them. **Christians are Empowered to Be Witnesses of God's Goodness.** Now, I know this may be a lot. So, here's how I want us to leave here today:

1. Embrace your Identity as a Witness of Jesus.
 - a. You are empowered by God's Spirit to share what you know about Jesus wherever you are, right now. This is who you are meant to be, what you are meant to do.
2. Know the Gospel Story
 - a. Think through your own testimony. How is Jesus the hero of your life?
 - b. And then think through these 4 categories. Is there a problem in your life right now? Take that problem and ask yourself these questions. Are you seeking "good news" outside of Jesus? Preach the gospel to yourself. That's the best way to learn the Gospel.
3. Listen and Share and Listen and Share some more
 - a. This type of listening doesn't come naturally, so give yourself some grace. But try it. And then share what you know to be true of God with that person. Proclaim His excellencies.
 - b. And then keep learning and practicing.
 - c. Find 1-2 people and get to know them and their stories. And then, drop in the truths of God as you respond. As you learn more of God, as you get more comfortable with this type of listening, and as the Spirit empowers you more and more...you will find yourself more naturally living out your identity as a Witness of God's Goodness.

Christians are Empowered to Be Witnesses of God's Goodness