

## **Introduction**

Some years ago, I was called to testify in a guardianship hearing at the Probate Court downtown. Before I took the stand though, the bailiff asked me, **"Do you swear that to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?"** Being the good Quaker that I am, I affirmed **"I do"** and then told the judge what I knew. I was a witness, in other words, and that, by way of analogy, is what I'm going to preach about today – you and I being witnesses.

## **Witnesses**

A Gentile physician named Luke wrote the book of Acts. In verse 1, he identifies to whom he writes it, Theophilus, a man about whom we know nothing. In verse 2, he calls Theophilus' attention to **"the first account"** that he wrote, which is the Gospel of Luke. That account, he observes, encompasses what Jesus said and did from the beginning of His ministry through His death, resurrection, and ascension.

The last chapter of his first account, 24, records the resurrection of Jesus and several post-resurrection appearances to disciples of His. It also comments briefly, in closing, on His ascension into heaven. That explains what Luke is doing in Acts 1:3-8. He's picking up where he left off in Luke 24. He sums up the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus in verse 3 and then elaborates on His ascension in verses 4-8.

Look at verse 8 in that regard. It records the very last words that the embodied Jesus spoke to His disciples. Those words were, **"and you shall be my witnesses."** That was the charge with which He left those disciples and us, **"and you shall be my witnesses."**

Notice I said, **"and us."** Jesus directs verse 8 not just to this 1st generation of disciples but to all the generations that follow as well, including ours. Verse 8, therefore, reveals one of our most significant privileges and responsibilities as disciples and friends of His. It's to be His witnesses.

To be that of course, we must understand what witnesses of His are. So let's understand that. Witnesses of Jesus are three things.

### People Who Know

First, they're people who know things - about Him and His kingdom. They possess information about Him and it.

Let's go back to our legal analogy again. Rules of evidence, generally, prohibit non-expert witnesses from testifying about what they think or believe to be so. They can usually only testify about what they know to be so. In one criminal case, for instance, the prosecutor asked a witness what the defendant did when the police came in to the room.

**"He winked,"** the witness said. The prosecutor then asked him what the wink meant. **"I think he was signaling me to make an alibi for him to cover up some of his actions,"** he replied. The appeals court allowed the first statement because it was a matter of knowledge. The witness saw the defendant wink. But it disallowed the second because it was a matter of opinion or belief. The court said, **"No one knows whether he was trying to convey a message, whether he was attempting to shut out a strong ray of light, or whether a bit of dust troubled him at the moment."** Generally, witnesses can testify about knowledge they have but not about opinions, conclusions, or beliefs. They're people who know.

That includes witnesses of Jesus. Notice the term **"convincing proofs"** in verse 3. Those proofs were the encounters the disciples had with the resurrected Jesus. They walked, talked, and ate with Him after He died. They knew beyond any doubt, therefore, that He had risen from the dead. They also knew what verse 3 calls **"the things concerning the kingdom of God."** During His earthly ministry, Jesus taught them primarily about those things. Then during the 40 days between His resurrection and ascension, He taught them even more about them.

We see then that witnesses of His don't just believe things about Him and His kingdom. They know (possess information) about them.

That implies what we need to do to be witnesses of His. We need to base our beliefs on knowledge. We gather as much information as we can about a particular subject, apply good logic to tie that information together, and then draw valid conclusions about it. Those valid conclusions constitute knowledge, which in turn makes us credible witnesses. Based on information and logic, for instance, I know that Jesus was the smartest person who ever lived or that followers of His never die (their consciousness and activity never cease). I am, therefore, a credible witness about those things.

### **People Who Tell what They Know**

There's a second thing that witnesses of Jesus are. The first is that they're people who know things about Him and His kingdom. The second is that they're people who tell others what they know.

I once represented the defendant in an aggravated robbery case. One of the alibi witnesses I was going to call at trial was his sister. She was quite nervous about testifying though and asked me, "**What am I supposed to do.**" So, I told her: "**I'll ask you a series of questions. Just tell what you know when I do.**" That is by definition what witnesses in legal proceedings do. They tell the trier of fact, either a judge or jury, what they know to so.

It's the same with witnesses of Jesus.

Consider Acts 2:24 and Peter's first witness, on the day of Pentecost. He told a large crowd of people, "**But God raised Him (Jesus) up again.**" Also consider verses like Acts 8:12; 14:22; 19:8, 20:25; and 28:23, 31. 19:8, for instance, says, "**And he (Paul) entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God.**" Study Acts and you'll discover what the central message of the first Christians and church was about – the resurrection and kingdom of Jesus.

Why was it about that? It's because, as we saw in 1:3, that's what they knew. They simply made known what they knew was so. And so

should we. That's what witnessing is all about. We make known to the unsaved what we know is so about Jesus and His kingdom.

Now, doing that shouldn't be something that's artificial or forced. On the contrary, it should be something that arises naturally in our normal interactions with the unsaved. We tell them what we know is so about Jesus and His kingdom as natural opportunities for doing so present themselves. A natural opportunity is a conversation or circumstance in which it's relevant for us to say what we know about Him and it. It's natural because we don't have to force talking about Him or it. We simply apply what we know about Him or it to the issues or topics that are before the unsaved and us.

During the break at a conference years ago, an unsaved man suddenly, out of the blue, began telling me about a problem he had. He'd awaken almost every night with a horrible sense of dread about dying. It was a natural opportunity and I took it. I said to him: **"You might be interested in what Jesus has to say about that. Disciples of His never die. Their consciousness and activity never cease. After life on earth, they become alive as never before."** I applied what I knew to an issue that he himself raised.

On another occasion, I talked with the unsaved father of a son who had dwarfism. He commented as we conversed that **"people care way too much about looks."** It was a natural opportunity and I took it. I said to him: **"Jesus would agree. He says that He values inner not outer beauty. And that He gives those who follow Him just that – an inner beauty that shines so brightly that their bodies are hardly noticeable at all."** I applied what I knew to an issue that he himself raised.

Those interactions with those two men illustrate three truths. First, we frequently have natural opportunities to tell what we know about Jesus and His kingdom. Second, the more we know about Him and it, the more of those natural opportunities we can take. And third, we need to spot and take those natural opportunities when they arise.

## People Who Are Empowered

Witnesses of Jesus are a third thing. They're people who are empowered. That's the most striking feature of our text. In verses 4-5, Jesus instructed His disciples to remain in Jerusalem where God would baptize them with the Holy Spirit. In verse 6, the disciples wondered about the significance of that event. Would it precipitate God restoring the kingdom to Israel, as the Old Testament prophets predicted He would? In verses 7-8, Jesus answered that it would not. It would empower them to be His witnesses to the world instead.

Those verses imply several things one of which is this. Witnessing is a transcendent activity. Its defining issues and realities are supernatural not natural. The fact is that it's totally beyond any human being's reach to win someone to Jesus. It's a God-thing, not a human thing. That means that the four "Powerful P's" of sales (persuasion, programs, promotion, and personality) aren't decisive factors in witnessing. There's only one thing that is and it's power, the power of the Holy Spirit.

That power is available to all of us who are disciples of Jesus. And we should avail ourselves of it by doing two things.

First, **"target screen"** family, friends, and acquaintances of ours who are unsaved. We target screen a person by praying and asking the Holy Spirit to do four things. #1 – **"Make this person's thoughts clear, feelings sensitive, will submissive, and soul open – to Jesus."** #2 – **"Bind the work of Satan in this person's thoughts, feelings, will, and soul so that he or she is free to decide for or against Jesus."** #3 – **"Give me and make me aware of natural opportunities to witness to this person."** And #4 – **"'Be with my mouth' (Exodus 4:15) as I witness to this person. Endow me with wisdom and words that are not my own."** Regularly ask the Holy Spirit to do those things. Then be ready to witness when He does.

We avail ourselves of the Holy Spirit's power by doing a second thing. Ask Him for, be open to, and act on what are called **"divine**

**appointments.”** A divine appointment is a meeting that the Holy Spirit arranges between a disciple and an unsaved person that demonstrates the kingdom at hand. What happens is that He gives us thoughts and/or impressions that lead us to witness to an unsaved person, whom we may or may not know. He then reveals Himself to that person as we do through spiritual gifts or other supernatural phenomena.

A businessman named Kerry routinely asked the Holy Spirit to provide opportunities for him to witness. As he was driving home from work one day, the strong thought suddenly entered his mind to stop at a certain restaurant, look for a waitress there, and witness to her. So, he stopped at the restaurant and sat down. A waitress, whom he had never met, approached him after he did and before he could speak, said, **“You have something for me don’t you?”** Kerry answered that he did and shared two words of knowledge the Holy Spirit gave him about her job and a relationship, both of which were troubling her. Knowing she was encountering God, she began conversing with Kerry. They then prayed together, after which she decided to follow Jesus.

Kerry’s experience teaches us two things. First, we should routinely ask the Holy Spirit to give us divine appointments. Second, we should be open to and act on them when He does.

## **Conclusion**

That then is what witnesses of Jesus are. They’re people who know things about Him and His kingdom, tell what they know, and are empowered by the Holy Spirit in doing so. Let me ask a question in closing. Are you and I witnesses of His? If not, we should be! Francis Schaeffer said it well: **“All the church is to be made up of tellers. Everyone is bound to be a teller in his own place, in his own calling, according to the individual vocation God has given Him.”** He was exactly right. I don’t care who you are, where you are, or what you do. If you’re a disciple of Jesus, then you’re a witness, a teller, as well.