

Mission Possible
Rev. Brian Bill
Acts 1:6-11
September 21-22, 2019

Sermon Bumper: [Tell Me](#)

A witness is simply someone who speaks from personal experience about what is true. How are you doing at telling people the truth about Jesus? A first-hand witness reports what was personally seen, heard and in some cases, touched.

A week ago Beth and I witnessed an event that we will never forget and if you give us enough time, we can talk about it for hours on end. Our daughter Emily and son-in-law Matt gave birth to Ruby Beth and we were there as witnesses (not in the delivery room but shortly afterwards). Ruby joins her cousins Pip and Ezra as our third grandchild. Since a witness is called upon to furnish evidence, I brought some with me today [show pictures].

In order to establish the veracity of something, there are six questions called “reporter’s questions” that are often asked – *when, who, how, what, where* and *why*? A witness is one who can testify *when* something happened, *who* was involved, *how* it unfolded, *what* happened, *where* it took place and *why* they think it happened.

We’ll see each of these elements addressed in Acts 1:6-11: ***“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. And 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.’”***

We could sum up the sermon this way: *We’re called to witness where we are, but not stay where we are.*

1. Perspective. The first thing a witness establishes is *when* something occurred. While the disciples were focused on the future, Jesus wanted them to be fully focused on the present. We see this in verses 6-7: ***“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.’”***

The tense of the disciples’ question indicates they repeatedly asked about the timing of the kingdom. For a long time I thought it was wrong for the disciples to ask this but I realize it was a natural question. Jesus often talked about the coming of the kingdom in passages like Matthew 19:28: ***“Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”***

Their question actually represented a strong faith in Jesus as the Sovereign Lord who would one day rule and reign as king over His kingdom. They were also eager to see God’s glory fill the earth and wanted to know if this was the time it would happen.

Jesus doesn’t rebuke them for their question but instead tenderly redirects them. He tells them they don’t need to know about the timing because it’s time for them to take up the task He has for them.

2. People. The disciples’ perspective was locked into *when* God was going to inaugurate His kingdom and now in the first part of verse 8 we see Jesus telling them *who* He was going to use to accomplish His work: ***“But you...”*** The word ***“but”*** is a term of contrast suggesting a *“change of direction.”* They wanted to talk about prophecy but Jesus wanted them to focus on proclamation. The word ***“you”*** shows this is a personal command for every follower of Christ. J. Vernon McGee says, *“It’s our business to get the Word of God out to the world.”*

Verse 8 contains the last recorded statement of Jesus in the Bible. This final command must become our first concern because Jesus continues His work today through individuals and the institution called the church. I like what David Platt says in this regard: *“The church is not a building to see or a place to sit. The church is a movement to join.”*

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3. Power. Jesus not only told them they were the people He wanted to use; He also informed them *how* He was going to do it in the second part of verse 8: “...*you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you...*” The promised Holy Spirit will give them everything they need to do all they were called to do. The word “*power*” is used 10 times in the Book of Acts, and is the Greek word *dunamis*, from which we get dynamic, dynamo and dynamite.

Acts 4:31 tells us what happened when Christ followers were filled with the power of the Holy Spirit: “*And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.*”

Dr. Howard Hendricks offers this great insight, “*It’s not, ‘You are going to be witnesses and then receive power,’ but the other way around: ‘you are going to receive power, the result of which is, you are going to be witnesses.*” Like a grandparent who can’t keep the news about a newborn to himself, so too, when the Holy Spirit gives us His power we can’t stop talking about the new birth.

Notice it’s not “*if*” the Holy Spirit will come upon them; it’s “*when*” He does. The phrase “*has come*” is in the aorist tense, which indicates the Spirit’s coming will be a definite historic event. This happened on the Day of Pentecost and takes place immediately upon conversion for every believer since that day.

Don’t miss how important this is. Without the power of the Holy Spirit, we are powerless. Without His help, we are helpless. Without fortifying us, we’ll be way too afraid. But with His power, we can do what He calls us to do.

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4. Plan. In the next part of verse 8 we see *what* the disciples are called to be: “...*and you will be my witnesses...*” This is both a command and a commission.

Look again at the phrase – “*and you will be my witnesses...*” It’s more a matter of being, and less about doing. Jesus doesn’t say, “You shall *do*, but you shall *be*.” We’re not merely to *bear* witness, we are to *be* witnesses. To put it another way, you are already a witness. The question is, “*What is your witness communicating?*”

When we were out in Virginia I went for a run one day and saw a car covered with over 50 bumper stickers! They were on the back window, on the doors, on the hood and trunk and splattered all over the bumpers [it looked a bit like this]. I stopped to read a few of them and immediately drew some conclusions that the owner of the car was cantenkourous, contentious, caustic and crude. I slowly backed away because if he put into practice what he was advertising my life would have ended right there. Why couldn't he just advertise something more pleasant like this vehicle? [show slide]

Here are a few questions to consider: *What are people reading when they take a close look at your life? What are you advertising? What kind of witness are you?*

Jesus says, ***“you will be my witnesses.”*** There are two meanings of this. First, we are witnesses *about* Jesus as we report His redemptive work in our lives. Second, we are witnesses *of* Jesus, meaning we belong to Him and are sent out as His ambassadors.

A witness is one who has seen and heard and experienced the explosive life-changing power of Christ in their life. Jesus said it this way in Luke 24:48: ***“You are witnesses of these things.”*** Acts 4:20 describes the work of witnesses: ***“For we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.”***

The word ***“witness”*** is found 29 times in Acts. Here are just a few passages.

- Acts 2:32: ***“This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses.”***
- Acts 10:39: ***“And we are witnesses of all that He did...”***
- Acts 22:15: ***“For you will be a witness for Him to everyone of what you have seen and heard.”***

We don't have to be expressive evangelists or persuasive preachers. Our job is not to be prosecutors or even defense attorneys – our work is simply to be witnesses who report what we have experienced and know to be true. You don't have to have all the answers to be a witness. You don't have to be eloquent, convincing or clever. Simply speak like the man in John 9:25: ***“One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.”*** Here's one of the best definitions of a witness I've heard: *“A witness is anyone who cooperates with the Holy Spirit in telling others about Jesus.”*

I don't mean to imply that this is always easy to do. But we don't have to fear when we're simply sharing the facts about what is true. We see this in Isaiah 44:8: ***“Fear not, nor be afraid; have I not told you from of old and declared it? And you are my witnesses!”***

It helps me to remember in the Greek, the word witness is nearly identical to the word for martyr. Martyrs bear the ultimate witness to the truth by remaining loyal to the end. If so many have died for Jesus, how can I not live for Him?

BTW, a witness can't testify on hearsay but only about what he or she has heard someone say or do. If you don't have a dynamic relationship with Christ, you will struggle to be a winsome witness for Christ.

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5. Place. In the last part of verse 8, Jesus makes it clear *where* He wants His witnesses to witness: ***“...in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.”*** While He wanted the disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the power of the Holy Spirit and then to be His witnesses there, Jesus never intended the gospel message to stop there.

In a similar way, we're to start in our neighborhoods and then scatter to the nations. It's not an either/or but a both/and because we're responsible to reach all four spheres – our Jerusalem, our Judea, our Samaria *and* the ends of the earth.

- **Jerusalem.** This was the Jewish capital and was where the gospel was to penetrate first. Jesus made this clear in Luke 24:47-49: ***“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.”*** The first followers of Jesus did such a great job their enemies said this about them in Acts 5:28: ***“... you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching...”***
- **Judea.** Since most of the Israelites who returned from the exile were from the tribe of Judah, they were called Jews and their land, Judea. In New Testament times, Judea made up the southern portion of Israel.

- **Samaria.** This area to the north of Jerusalem was where the hated half-breed Samaritans lived. Jesus is speaking to Jews who wouldn't even walk through Samaria, much less witness about Jesus there. I'm reminded we're to take the gospel to people we don't like. Evangelism must include our enemies. Who might that be in our world today? Muslims? People from the opposite political party we're in? People from different races? Refugees and immigrants?
- **End of the earth.** The word "*end*" means, "*remote or extreme.*" Jesus said it like this in Mark 16:15 (KJV): "***Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to every creature.***" At that time, Rome was considered the farthest away at 1400 miles from Jerusalem. The Book of Acts ends in 28:31 with this report about Paul from Rome: "***Proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.***" From Rome the gospel literally traveled to the ends of the earth. We're to cross all regional, cultural, linguistic and geographical barriers to share the gospel of grace as witnesses to the whole world.

Here are a few observations based on Acts 1:8.

- **This is the key verse in the Book of Acts and serves as the outline for the geographical spread of the gospel.** In chapters 1-7, the focus is on Jerusalem; in chapters 8-11:18, the gospel moves out to Judea and Samaria; and in chapters 11:19-28, the message resonates all the way to Rome.
- **While the gospel penetrated Jerusalem, it took persecution to shake the believers loose from their comfortable surroundings.** In other words, God sent hard times in order to get them back on track. Look at Acts 8:1 (just reverse the numbers from 1:8): "***And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria...***" Sometimes we need a push before we will commit to God's purposes, don't we?
- **God's goal has always been for His glory to go global.** Because the nation of Israel fell into idolatry, they didn't do a good job taking God's message to the masses like they were mandated to do in Psalm 65:8: "***So that those who dwell at the ends of the earth are in awe at your signs.***" It's our job to do that now.

It helps me to flesh out Acts 1:8 this way:

Jerusalem	Our <i>community</i>
Judea	Our <i>counties</i>
Samaria	Our <i>country</i>
Ends of the earth	The <i>continents</i>

We start with our neighbors and then we spread out to the nations.

Shortly after we arrived in the QCA, I asked Marie Guyton, our office assistant to plot out on a map where everyone at Edgewood lives. A couple weeks later, during our weekly team time, I asked the staff to tell me where Edgewood is located. One team member said we're just north of Saukie Golf Course. Another reported we're located one mile south of Augie. Several responded by giving the address - 2704 38th Street. One of the more geeky guys gave the longitude and latitude. After allowing for some uncomfortable silence, I stood up and unrolled this map [it was bigger than this] on the conference table and said, "*No, that's where Edgewood's located!*"

I asked Marie to update this project and plot out where everyone lives today [show map]. You can see we have the complete QCA covered! When each of us intentionally live on mission, the message of the gospel will penetrate this entire community! May we be like the believers in Acts 8:4: "***Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.***" *We're called to witness where we are, but not stay where we are.*

Let's begin with our neighbors but let's also assess how we're doing at going global with the gospel. Here are some stats.

- **North America is no longer the main missionary-sending continent in the world.** Nations once considered by American Christians to be primary mission fields are now sending missionaries to us.
- **There are still approximately 6,900 unreached people groups.**
- **Most unreached people live in the 10/40 window.** This is a band across Africa and Asia stretching from 10 degrees latitude north of the equator to 40 degrees north. Here's a stunning statistic: *Of the 55 least evangelized countries, 97% of their population lies within the 10/40 window.* And only about 2.4% of the global missionary force is working there.

Over the past five years, Edgewood has been giving intentional focus to partnering with Go Team members who are committed to take the gospel to the least reached parts of the world. The last four couples we sent out are ministering in the 10/40 window.

Sometimes I hear people say we shouldn't be evangelizing to the ends of the earth because the need is so great right here. Think about this - in northern Africa, there is only one pastor or missionary for every two million people. If we take this ratio and apply it to the U.S., we would have only about 120 full-time Christian workers and just 7 small churches in our entire country!

John Piper reminds us we have three choices – we can *go*, we can *send*, or we can *disobey*.

Edgewood currently supports 84 Go Team partners, which includes individual family units and mission agencies. Here's a breakdown of what this looks like.

- 62% of our Go Team partners are ministering to the ends of the earth, 19% are focused in Samaria, 6% in Judea and 4% in Jerusalem.
- Here are the total numbers...
 - ✓ QCA Go Team Partners = 7
 - ✓ US Go Team Partners = 14
 - ✓ Global Go Team Partners = 53
 - ✓ Retired Go Team Partners = 8

Total = 82

- Here's a visual representation of our Go Team partners in the QCA (World Relief, Moody Radio, Safe Families for Children, Pregnancy Resources, Christian Care, Youth Hope, Intervarsity at Augie and Blackhawk). I also consider EBC ministries like Mainspring, Celebrate Recovery, Awana, Fall Festival of Fun, Grief Care, Divorce Care and Financial Peace University as outreaches to our community.
- Included among our Go Team Partners in the U.S. are Manuel and Kim Contreras in Fresno, Keep Believing Ministries located in Kansas City but

with a worldwide impact, and Voice of the Martyrs, a ministry focused on supporting persecuted Christians around the world.

- Here's a visual depiction of where our Global Go Team partners are serving.
- Approximately 9% of what is given to our general fund either digitally or through our weekend offerings goes to support our Go Team partners.

When God sent out missionaries in the Book of Acts, they would eventually come back to the churches that sent them and let them know what God had done through their ministry. We have that privilege this weekend as Joel Smith, a teenage member of Edgewood, has returned from his seventh short-term mission trip. Joel is a senior at Davenport Central.

Joel Smith Interview

1. Please tell us what you did this past summer? [Street ministry in Hungary, Romania and Slovakia]
2. Can you share a story about what you saw God do?
3. How has this trip impacted your life? [Learned to pull weeds and plant seeds; sensing God drawing him to orphan ministry]

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We've looked at the *when, who, how, what, and where*. Let's end by looking at *why* we're to be witnesses.

6. Promise. In verses 9-11, Jesus tells us *why* we're to be His witnesses to our neighbors and to the nations: ***“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. And 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.’”***

As the disciples are locked onto the Lord, they watch gravity lose its power as He is lifted up into a cloud. This was not a fluffy cumulus cloud but rather the glory cloud that surrounded the very presence of God as depicted in Exodus 19:9: ***“And the LORD said to Moses, ‘Behold, I am coming to you in a thick cloud, that the***

people may hear when I speak with you, and may also believe you forever.” According to Exodus 13:21, “...*the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way.*” At the Transfiguration in Luke 9:35 we read, “*And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, ‘This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!’*” It’s as if God the Father wrapped His Son in the comfort of His cloud in order to welcome Him home.

The words “*gazing*” and “*looking*” mean, “*to fasten the eyes upon, to look intently at something.*” They’re not just standing in amazement because the word suggests a look of sadness and brokenness, like they’ve lost the Lord forever. Listen. No one is lost if you know where they are. That’s the confident assurance we have when a believer leaves this world to live forever with Christ. The ascension confirms what Jesus declared has now been delivered.

As we learned two weeks ago, when Jesus went up, the Holy Spirit came down. Jesus is now praying for us according to Hebrews 7:25: “*He always lives to make intercession for them.*” Plus, we have the promise He will come back in the same way He ascended – personally, visibly and gloriously. Matthew 24:30: “*Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.*”

The implication is clear from the angels - *instead of staring up, start sharing around.* We’re to be witnesses while we wait. I like how the KJV translates what Jesus said in Luke 19:13: “*Occupy till I come.*”

This reminds me of what happened when a church put on an Easter Cantata. During the closing scene depicting the Ascension of Christ, the actor playing Jesus was slowly hoisted out of sight through an opening in the ceiling.

The flight upward was progressing smoothly, until the stage crew briefly lost their grip on the rope and the actor nearly dropped back to the stage. With enviable stage presence, he remained in character as his feet dangled inches from the floor and his bewildered disciples looked on in horror. Without skipping a beat he said, “*Oh, and one more thing...love your neighbor as yourself.*” Immediately the rope yanked him up into the ceiling and out of sight.

While Jesus certainly wants us to love our neighbors, His final words reveal we must also love the nations.

As we land this message, here's a question to ponder: *Have you ever wondered why, when God saved you, He left you on earth?* Why wouldn't God take us to Heaven immediately after saving us? Because His plan to reach the world is through His witnesses.

Here are a two ways to put the preaching into practice so that Christ's last command will be our first commitment.

1. Grow your faith. What next step do you need to take spiritually? Do you need to plug into a Growth Group, get baptized, or become a member?

2. Be a blessing. In his book *Missional Entrepreneur*, Mark Russell summarized a study performed on two different missionary teams in Thailand. One team's strategy was to start a business and focus on blessing people in tangible ways. We could call them the *blessers*. The second group also started a business but their strategy was to focus on getting converts. This group could be called the *converters*.

The study followed these two groups for five years and found the *blessers* had 50 times as many conversions as the *converter* group! The *blessers* not only had more fruit than the *converters* they also made life better for people in practical ways.

Intuitively, we know what this study proved empirically. It is only when we bless people through our witness and our words that they develop an interest in why we are doing it.

I appreciated Pastor Tim's application last weekend to help us focus on how to BLESS those close to us by following the acrostic B.L.E.S.S. There are additional bookmarks available in the lobby if you need one.

Begin with prayer. *You could pray something like this, "God, how do you want me to bless the people you have placed in my life?"*

Listen attentively. *Take the time to listen to the needs, struggles and pain of people around you.*

Eat together. *Look for ways to have a cup of coffee, a meal, or a dessert in order to build a connection.*

Serve in practical ways. *Look for ways to respond to the needs, struggles and pain of the people around you.*

Share the story of Jesus. *When the time is right, share the story of how Jesus Christ has changed your life.*

Let's get in the practice of asking this question every day: *"God, who do you want me to bless today?"* It would be great if we would begin every Growth Group gathering with a question like this: *"How has God used you to bless someone this week?"*

According to one count, the gospels record 132 contacts Jesus had with people. Six of these interactions were in the Temple, four took place in synagogues, and 122 happened with people in the mainstream of life. Brothers and sisters, we need to break from our holy huddles to spend time with the harried and hurried, the wayward and worried. The effectiveness of our witness is in direct proportion to how much love we have for lost people.

Closing Video: ["Love People, Not Evangelism"](#)