

# Vision 20/20

*“Have you never read in the Scriptures: “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes”?”  
(Matthew 21:42 ESV)*

*“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.”  
(Acts 1:8 ESV)*

*“Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.”  
(Matthew 25:13 ESV)*

## **You Will Be My Witnesses**

**September 29<sup>th</sup> 2019**

**Acts 1:6-11**

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### **Introduction:**

Good morning!

We are in week two of a ten-week series in which we will be working through our mission statement as a church. To be clear: The mission hasn't changed! We are operating with the same marching orders that we received 2000 years ago! But the sad reality is that we leak.

So we're going to take some time as a church to remember WHO God has made us to be. To that end, would you open your Bibles this morning to Acts 1:6-11.

Last week, we saw that Jesus Christ is the Cornerstone of the church. Everything that we do – everything that we are – will be built upon Christ. That is the heart of the heart of our identity. We are Jesus people built on the Jesus foundation. But what exactly is God building here?

Can you image trying to build a puzzle without first looking at the box? You've got all of the pieces, and you're trying to put them together but you don't know what the end goal is. You need to look back at the box, intently and regularly so that you can stay on track.

So it is here. This morning, we're "looking at the box" again. We're asking the question: Who has God made us to be? Because we want to live that out! We only have one life!

Who has God made us to be? Jesus answers that question in today's text. Look with me now at Acts 1:6-11. Hear now God's holy, inspired, living and active word to us today:

So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"<sup>7</sup> He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority."<sup>8</sup> 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."<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup> And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes,<sup>11</sup> 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." (Acts 1:6-11 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord – thanks be to God!

Who has God made us to be? We find the answer right in the center of verse 8. Jesus says: You will be my WITNESSES.

### **You Will Be My Witnesses**

As we study the text, we are going to see this statement fleshed out in three important ways. First and foremost, if we are going to understand our identity as witnesses, we need to ask the question: Witnesses to what?

#### **1. We are witnesses to a glorious saviour**

Our whole identity – all of who we are as individuals and all of who we are as a corporate body – is bound up in this truth: We are witnesses to Jesus Christ!

When someone asks us: "What is this hope that you have?" We answer: "Jesus!" Where does your peace come from? Jesus. What is your life all about? Jesus. Where do you get this boldness? Jesus. What is your confidence? Jesus. Your righteousness? Jesus. Your salvation? Jesus. Your

joy? Jesus! It's all Jesus! He is the message! He is the hope! He is what I am all about and this life that I am living exists for one purpose: to bear witness to a lost and broken world about my glorious Saviour Jesus Christ! The light of the world has come and we are WITNESSES!

But you can't be a witness to something you haven't seen, can you? If you haven't seen Christ – if God hasn't opened your eyes to behold him in his splendor and glory – then you CANNOT be his witness!

Let's stop right here. Brothers and sisters, have you seen him?

His name is Jesus and He is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. He lived the perfect life. He loved perfectly. He obeyed perfectly. He showed perfect compassion and perfect generosity and yet, we despised him. He stood silently as we falsely accused him. He suffered patiently as we beat him. He sighed in pain as we crucified him. And there, on that cross, Jesus took upon himself the penalty for the sins of the world. All of our guilt, and our shame, and our condemnation and the punishment that we deserved was laid on him. All of the wrath and the displeasure of God was born by him. And as he cried out "It is finished!" something remarkable happened: The penalty for our sin was once for all absorbed by the perfect substitute. It is gone.

If you confess your sin and surrender your life to Jesus Christ – if you look to him on that cross and believe in faith that he died in your place – your sin will be removed FOREVER. It's gone!

And three days after that scene on the cross, the Saviour of the world walked out of his tomb proving once and for all that death no longer has the final word for those who are in Christ Jesus. The disciples watched as the Son of Man ascended into Heaven and disappeared into a cloud of glory where he is now reigning at the right hand of the Father. And he will soon return once and for all and we will reign with him over all creation.

Christian, have you seen him?

Have you seen him take a hard heart and replace it with a heart of flesh? Have you seen him enter into the brokenness of your life and restore you as he healed things that you didn't even know were broken? Have you felt his tenderness as he picked you up in the midst of all of your sin and

washed you with his own blood and set your feet upon the rock. Have you experienced the miracle of being transformed from a rebel to a son?

If you have, then your life should be about one thing: Bearing witness to what you have seen.

This is what we are about as a church. We are Jesus people who proclaim the Jesus message because we believe that the gospel of Jesus Christ is the only thing in the universe that has the power to bring everlasting life.

So, how are we going to do that?

Well for starters, we're going to speak. We're going to proclaim this glorious gospel in our gatherings and then we're going to keep proclaiming it as we go out from this place into the world.

I imagine this morning that there are some of us here today who feel like we're falling short in this area. Maybe you want to share your faith, but you feel like you can't. You don't even know where you would start. If that's you, then we've got something for you. From now on we are going to be running a three-week evangelism training course twice a year, every year. If you ever feel like you're losing sight of the mission or if you ever worry that you don't know how to explain the gospel to your neighbor then you can hop in on this course for a refresher and for some encouragement. Matt and Jil Koller will be leading our first group. There's a signup sheet at the back and I'd really encourage you to take advantage of that.

We are witnesses so we are going to speak.

But we're not going to stop there. As we share this good news we are going to adorn it with good works. We're going to strive to live lives that reflect the gospel that we preach. That's the example that we see in the book of Acts. One commentator notes:

In the final analysis, Luke indicates that effective Christian witness involves both a **sharing** of the apostolic testimony to Jesus and a **demonstration** of spiritual and moral transformation arising from personal commitment to the risen Lord.<sup>1</sup>

We want people to SEE the gospel working in us. Your witness is MORE than just your words! It starts there, but it extends to your marriage, and your parenting, and the way that you conduct yourself at work. Every aspect of your life should make the gospel look compelling to the watching world. The Apostle Paul captured some of this in his letter to the Corinthians. He wrote:

Therefore, we are **ambassadors** for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (2 Corinthians 5:20 ESV)

Do you know what an ambassador does? He represents the will of the nation that sent him. When you walk into the Canadian embassy in India, if that ambassador is doing what he's supposed to be doing, you should feel like you're stepping right back onto Canadian soil. The ambassador who gives himself creative liberty and who adorns the Canadian embassy with American flags or hammer and sickle paraphanelia will quickly find himself unemployed! As an ambassador he is fundamentally someone who reflects the one who sent him.

And that's who we are! We are ambassadors for Christ. We are witnesses of his gospel. When people walk into this place, they should get the sense that they are walking on foreign soil. When we go out into the world we should so clearly reflect Christ that people stop to ask us: "Who are you people?" We're going to meet real, physical needs in our city and show real, practical love. And as we show the love of Christ in our actions, we are going to express the love of Christ with our words. Amen?

Let me just acknowledge that this has been a long point. We're going to move quicker now.

Second:

## **2. We are witnesses locally and to the ends of the earth**

Look with me again at verses 6-8:

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<sup>1</sup> David Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, PNTC; Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 111.

So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”<sup>7</sup> He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.<sup>8</sup> 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.” (Acts 1:6-8 ESV)

They asked: “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” If you remember from our time studying the book of Mark, the disciples had long been after this. They were expecting that God would send a Messiah who would restore Israel to its political prominence and who would overthrow the tyranny of Rome. That was their expectation. And now that Jesus had risen from the grave – surely NOW – he would finally restore Israel!

But their view of the mission was still too small. They read the Old Testament and understood that God had set Israel apart as a chosen people for Himself, but they had forgotten WHY! God chose Israel and showed mercy to Israel SO THAT they would extend His blessing TO THE NATIONS! In Genesis 22, God said to Abraham:

I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies,<sup>18</sup> **and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed**, because you have obeyed my voice.” (Genesis 22:17-18 ESV)

But as we read the Old Testament, we come to see that Israel was often anything but a blessing. They wandered to and fro into sin and rebellion, so much so that – as we saw last week – God needed to grind them down to one final stone!

And now that He has done that work – now that Christ has arisen as the cornerstone upon which God will rebuild His people – it should not surprise us that God continues on with the same plan that He had from the beginning: On the foundation of Jesus Christ, God is building a church that will bring His blessing to the ends of the earth.

That’s what we are doing as we bear witness: We are bringing God’s blessing into the world.

And now I want you to see this in the text. Look at verse 8:

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.” (Acts 1:8 ESV)

This mission that stretches to the end of the earth begins **LOCALLY!** The first thing that the disciples did when the Spirit fell upon them was to go down the stairs, out the door and into the streets of Jerusalem! Before they brought the Gospel to the ends of the earth, they preached it at the end of their street.

THAT is fundamental to the way that we understand our witness at this church. We believe that our ministry begins right here.

It is no accident that God has placed us here, in the South Ward of Orillia, Ontario. This is our “Jerusalem”. There are 31,000 people in this city. So, how are we going to reach them with the gospel? If that’s not a question that you’re asking yourself at night then you are **FORGETTING** who God made you to be. You’re a witness.

And the witnessing begins right here. It begins with your family. It stretches to your neighbor and your coworker. It stretches to the people who are living on that street in the South Ward that you committed to pray for. We cannot rest until every man and woman, boy and girl in this city has heard the good news of Jesus Christ.

And then the mission spreads! Look at the text. The mission doesn’t stay local. The disciples were to move from Jerusalem to Judea and then to the ends of the earth!

This is why we’re so excited about what Craig and Rene are doing in South Africa! This is why I hope you will put it in your calendars to attend the missions support dinner on Tuesday, October 8 to find out how you can better pray for them and partner with them.

Our mission begins locally, and it spreads to India, South Africa, and the ends of the earth.

And then finally:

### **3. We are witnesses who are empowered by the Holy Spirit**

If we lose sight of this, then we will be of no use in God's purposes for Orillia.

Because the Kingdom of God is a spiritual kingdom not a political kingdom. It advances and grows in ways that are entirely supernatural. It is not advanced by the power of the sword but by the power of the Spirit-filled proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ! The kingdom of God advances as God miraculously and mercifully replaces stone hearts with hearts of flesh. It advances as rebels and sinners fall on their knees in repentance and worship.

And that is a very sobering reality because there is not a person in this room who can make any of that happen. Did you know that? It's important that you do. We have a number of skillsets represented in this room – we have doctors and teachers and plumbers – but there is not a single person in the room this morning who can bring spiritually dead people to life! That is supernatural work.

But thanks be to God, we have been equipped with supernatural help. Jesus told his disciples:

<sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses (Acts 1:7-8a ESV)

Here, Jesus is alluding back to a promise that he had previously made to his disciples. He had told them:

Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. (John 16:7 ESV)

Jesus ascended to Heaven so that he could, in a sense, send the power of Heaven down. The disciples couldn't imagine anything greater than the God of the universe sitting next to them answering their every question. This is why God had to send down an angel to keep them from continuing to stand there staring at the clouds after Jesus left them! What could be better than doing ministry with the God of the universe standing next to you?

Only one thing could be better than that. We read about it in the very next chapter. Flip ahead with me to chapter 2:

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup> And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup> And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. <sup>4</sup> And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

<sup>5</sup> Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. <sup>6</sup> And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. <sup>7</sup> And they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?” <sup>8</sup> And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? <sup>9</sup> Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, <sup>10</sup> Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, <sup>11</sup> both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.” <sup>12</sup> And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” (Acts 2:1-12 ESV)

The only thing better than having the God of the universe standing next to you is the God of the universe dwelling INSIDE of you! And that’s what happened at Pentecost. Now, there’s a lot that could be said about that text but let’s make sure that we see the main thing that we are meant to see. On the day of Pentecost EVERYTHING CHANGED! The church received the Holy Spirit and was immediately empowered to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ! He even empowered them to preach the gospel in languages that they didn’t understand! It was like a huge exclamation mark displaying prominently that this message would advance by God’s strength.

We have been given a mission that is not humanly possible, but God has given us a supernatural power to accomplish the impossible. If you are here this morning and you have repented of your sins and placed your trust in Jesus Christ then the Holy Spirit dwells in you! Galatians 4:6 says:

And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” (Galatians 4:6 ESV)

You, Christian, have the God of the universe dwelling inside of you. This church, built on the cornerstone of Jesus Christ is filled with the Spirit of God and we are on a spiritual mission.

In Paul's letter to the Corinthians he describes the various gifts that God has distributed amongst the church. The Bible says that EVERY Christian has a spiritual gift that is needed to further the Kingdom of God. We as a people are not assembled to listen to one person use their gift. We are assembled to witness Christ again and then to go and use the gifts that God has given to each and every one of us to spread this amazing news. There are no spectators in God's kingdom. There are no superstars. There is Christ and there are forgiven sinners, filled with the Spirit of God who proclaim Christ.

I want to conclude this morning with one obvious observation.

If we are on a supernatural mission that can only be accomplished by supernatural power then the failure or success of our mission will rise or fall – humanly speaking – on our commitment to prayer.

The church that doesn't pray communicates that they believe that they can accomplish the mission in their own strength. But they can't. So they wont. Why would God ever bless a prayerless church? The same is true for us as individual believers. Why would God allow the prayerless Christian to lead people to Christ? We witness with our words and we witness with our lives but the POWER of that witness comes from God! We MUST be a people of prayer. Let's never lose sight of that!

If you've already adopted a road in the South Ward then please, let this be a reminder to pray for God to do what only He can do in the hearts and lives of the people living there. If you haven't, then would you consider partnering with us in this? Would you commit to praying for a street in the South Ward and making a point of reaching out to them and inviting them?

We're about to walk out of these doors. Remember who you are, Christian. Before you are a mother or a father; before you are a doctor or a plumber, you have an identity – a calling – that you will be held accountable for. Jesus says to us this morning:

You will be my witnesses.

Filled with the Spirit, witnessing locally and to the ends of the earth, this is who we are. And this is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.