

We Are Christ's Empowered Witnesses

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[0 : 00] Good morning. I feel like I am home. I see a lot of familiar faces and I'm thankful for you.

And I've been gone, but I tell you what, I still love people in Pickens and some of you are still dear to my heart. It's hard to believe that I'm up here preaching because I remember sitting in the balcony, not paying attention for years. And I never thought I would stand here and proclaim the gospel, but the Lord has a sense of humor. Aren't you glad that he just calls and saves and uses common people like you and me, that we don't have to be anything special. We just need to be available.

And God definitely makes a straight lick out of a crooked stick. I want to thank Fred, my brother in Christ, who's been faithful. I've been almost here 25 years and meeting 37 years ago. I remember in the hallway at East Pickens, brother Don introduced me to you and he went on to pastor at Utica, but just thank you for your investment. When I was looking at and praying about planting a church in Clemson, it was, it took faith. I didn't have a lot of it, but the Lord was gracious to kind of wet the fleece and dry the fleece numerous times to show me what I was supposed to do.

And I remember the first person that I talked to, Fred had come visit my dad who'd broken his hip. He was in the hospital and Fred came and just ministered to my dad. And I said, Fred, I just want to ask you a question. I'm thinking about and praying about, I can't get rid of it. It's on my heart. I think about it 24 seven about planting a church in Clemson. And he says, well, that's what you need to do. He said, I've been praying about it. Even Allison Dalton back there had been praying about it for years. And Fred says, I think you're the man let's move forward. And I want to tell you, that was a great boost to my heart. But also there's another man that played a key part here is Mendel Stewart, who was, um, serving as the, uh, district superintendent of Pickens County.

And I called him up and said, Hey, moving down. Uh, my kids are going to be going to school down there. Our middle son, Caleb's autistic, high function, but special needs, you know, him making a transition. We're scared to death because that's the worst thing for an autistic kid is to make that kind of transition. And he says, Hey, we're going to pray. We're going to cover it. And I want to tell you, he talked to the appropriate people. And there was a response to our son, Caleb even had a shadow that he never had an actual when we were there to take care of our son, Caleb. And so even Mendel praying and serving and being a part of this church plant. So I'm thankful for the investment because you gave for several years to support us as we got up and got going. And I want to tell you, it's a miracle. And we're thankful that we planted a church, but that we're a church that plants churches that we planted a cross point Bluffton. And then later renewal with Steven Watson that many of you know, in love. And we just sent a guy out last month to plant a church in Charlotte, North Carolina, there at UNC Charlotte, or they say now Charlotte, uh, they want to be independent and have their own university. And so planning a church, they're trying to go to cities that have colleges where we can connect and kind of take what we did as a pattern, as a blueprint and try to implement it there.

Of course there's differences, but to try to implement that. And so, uh, we're grateful that that you gave to us and then we've been able to give to others. I'm thankful for the partnership with many churches in the pillow network that you're a part of, like the church at Cherrydale with Matt Rogers and Redemption Hill in Boston with Tanner Turley and John Chastain that y'all sent teams there to support. It's hard to start a church up North. Not only just the people are cold to the gospel, but also the cost of living is at Zorban. And so without the support of you, they could not make it. And the church is flourishing there. The church at Blue Ridge with Ted Richard, and, uh, again, being a part of Renewal Church in Anderson. So thank you for your partnership with us and with these churches. And may we continue to do it more and more.

[4 : 14] I encourage you to pray. I encourage you to give, but I also encourage you to go and to be faithful in these church plants. And maybe Lord leads you to plant a church, raise up folks right here

and send them out to start a church somewhere. Peter Wagner, back in 1990, he was the professor of church growth at Fuller Theological Seminary, said this, the single most effective evangelistic methodology under heaven is planting new churches. That's how we're going to do it. And you think, well, a community has a lot of churches in it. Well, are they preaching the gospel? Are they true to the word? Are they outward or are they inward? And so church plants are bent to be outward and to be on mission and reaching people that others are not reaching. And so that is the way we're moving forward is the North American Mission Board, planting churches, even International Mission Board. We have three missionaries from our church that are over in India, up in the mountains in the Himalayas, leading people to Christ, them coming to know the Lord, starting a church, training pastors and equipping them. I had the joy of a few months ago going to India and teaching 60 pastors who had the influence of 500 churches in India. That was just humbling to be able to do that and to teach them for three days. And then we loaded up and drove to 10 buck to, I mean, into the boonies. And the only way that I could make it up to 10,000 feet in this valley to preach is I had the Lord in my inhaler. Both of those were helpful. And so we need to be on mission. In fact, that's what the Holy Spirit is up to. When they were worshiping and fasting in Acts chapter 13, says that the Holy Spirit said, I want you to set apart Barnabas and who? Paul for what I've called them to do. And as they worshiped and fasted and prayed, they laid hands on them and sent them out. And over 25 years later, Paul had already done three missionary journeys, planting churches, leading people to Christ, appointing elders and churches growing and reaching their concentric circles. So thank you. But the work is not done. Thank you for giving and praying and going. But we've got much to do. And so today, really, this title is this, we are Christ empowered witnesses. That acts as the continuing work of Christ through his empowered church. So today, we're going back to X's and O's, or as we say around here in

Pickens, cornbread and beans. You know what I mean? We're just going to get back to the basics. And we're just going to hear fresh and anew the reasons why we are Christ's witnesses. Why we are his empowered witnesses.

Rudy Gray, right? I thought I recognized you. Good to see you, my brother. Also pastor at Utica and heads our Baptist courier. Thank you, brother, for your faithfulness. Glad that you're here.

Write a good article about me. Make up something if you can. So Luke 24, and then our main text will be Acts chapter 1, really verses 3 through 11. But let's look at Luke 24 and Acts go together, right? Luke, the physician wrote the book of Luke, and he wrote Acts. They really go hand in hand. So Jesus is before the disciples, and this is what he says in Luke 24, 45 through 50. And he'll talk about being witnesses, going to the nations, and being empowered by the Spirit in Luke 24. Then it's repeated in Acts 1. So let's look at it. 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 the repentance and forgiveness of sin 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. Now let's go to Acts chapter 1, verse 3. He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during 40 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 on many days from now. Verse 6. 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, but the Father is 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, Samaria, and 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.

[9 : 45] 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. Lord, thank you for your word.

We are your disciples. We know by your word we are your empowered witnesses. May we realize that today, and may we live it out today in the days to come. We pray in Jesus' name.

So why or how are we Christ witnesses? There's four reasons that we find it in the text here. Really simple. If you're taking notes, I encourage you to do that. That we are Christ witnesses, empowered

witnesses, because Christ has been raised from the dead. That Christ is our risen Savior. The second thing that we will see is that Christ has given us his Holy Spirit. The third reason is that Christ has ascended to the right hand of the Father, that he has been exalted to a place of authority.

And then finally, we see in the scriptures that we can be Christ-empowered witnesses, because Christ is coming again. He is our returning King. He's our risen Savior. He's given us the Holy Spirit. He's our exalted Lord. And he is our soon returning King. So what I'm getting ready to tell you is historical, what took place 2,000 years ago. It's theological, and even greater than that, it's Christological. It's dealing with Jesus, who he is, and what he has done, that should motivate us.

[11 : 30] That missions begins with the right understanding of who God is, and who Christ Jesus is, and then what he's done in our life, and then what he's called us to do. So we're going to look at these wonderful truths, again, just basic foundational truths that will hopefully motivate us, encourage us to reach people in our concentric circles, and to also pray, give, and go in supporting church missions, planning, church plants and missions around the world.

So let's look at the first reason. Because Christ is our risen Savior. Look at verse 3. It says, He presented himself alive to them after his suffering, the passion week, by many proofs, appearing to them during 40 days and speaking about the kingdom of God. It starts here because what is being said actually happened. It's factual. It's historical that Jesus Christ was crucified, that he was buried, and on the third day, God raised him from the dead. And it says, during these 40 days, Jesus revealed himself to them. At least 11 to 12 occurrences of Jesus is recorded in the Gospels. I don't think all of them, because it says he was with them for 40 days.

And Jesus wanted them to know that he really was resurrected, that he was one who was dead, but now is alive forevermore, that he conquered sin, death, and the grave. Unquestionable.

I love what John says in 1 John 1, verses 1 through 3. He says this, that we have seen him with our eyes. We have touched him and held him with our own hands. We've even heard his voice. And John was communicating. It's real. He has been resurrected from the grave. It is the truth of the gospel, that if Jesus has not been raised from the dead, it says in 1 Corinthians 15, that we're a people most miserable. As I would say around here, why in the same hill we would be here today if Jesus is not raised from the dead? He is. Amen? He is the resurrected, victorious Savior who came to save us from our sins. And that is the central point of the message, is the resurrection of Christ. So we're messengers of this life-giving message. I love what Paul says in Romans chapter 1, verse 16. He says, that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation, first to the Jew and then to the Gentile. What is the gospel? Euangelion? The word means literally good news. And what's the good news? Christ was crucified, was buried on the third day. God raised him from the dead, according to 1 Corinthians 15.

That's the gospel. So if we're going to be his effective, empowered witnesses, we've got to preach the right message. We cannot compromise it. We must be specific and we must know what we're talking about.

[14 : 30] You've heard the phrase, hey, preach the gospel with your life and use words if necessary. That's a bad statement. It creates a dichotomy between living and speaking. When the Bible says we're to live the truth and we're to preach the truth. That people need to hear you articulate the gospel. Nobody's going to be led to the Lord by your moral life. They're going to be led to the Lord by your moral life. Maybe God using it to quicken their heart, but God's going to draw them as you share with them because God uses the gospel and the spirit of God working in you and through you and the spirit of God working in that person. And so we don't teach moralism that you can be better and Christ can make you better that you hear so often. It's not even preaching to people, hey, you have a hole in your heart and Jesus can fill that hole or you need peace and Jesus can give you peace or your life is falling apart.

Jesus can put it together. Well, Jesus can do all that and that can be the effects of the gospel penetrating our hearts. But the problem is that we're sinners before a holy God. Unless we acknowledge our sins and repent of our sins, we cannot be saved. We tell people the gospel, the resurrection power of the gospel, that you're lost and saved and undone and you cannot save yourself, but God can intervene and save you and make you righteous before his very presence. That's the gospel. That's the good news. We have discovered Crosspoint class at Crosspoint. And so the pastors take responsibility.

Mine is to share the gospel, kind of a plan of salvation. And then I talk about the Lord's Supper and baptism. Talk about the ordinances, those things ordained by Jesus that give us a picture of the gospel. And baptism and the Lord's Supper gives us a picture of the gospel. So that's my assignment.

But when I share the gospel with folks, I don't know if they're saved or not. Most of them are, they're coming to our church. I've been able to interact with them, but I'm not taking it for granted. And I am not taking it granted here today that you all know Christ personally as your savior.

But I tell them that if you join our church, then you need to have a meeting with the pastors or elders or some of our ministerial staff, even some of our laity that are trained. And you need to go through kind of an interview process. And we ask you to share your testimony. How did you come to Christ? And there's a lot of people that cannot nail down a specific day or time. I can. 8B4 Lever Hall, 2000, I mean, 1981, I'm thinking 2000. 1981, about February 15th, I came to know Christ. It was dramatic transformation. But most people can't, but they know that they're saved. And so we ask them to share their testimony. And then I say, all right, I'm a lost person. I'm sitting on this side of the desk. I don't know Jesus. Lead me to Jesus. Tell me the gospel in three minutes. And some people jump in and just smoke it. I mean, they know the gospel and I get saved all over again. Just kidding.

[17:29] And there's some people look at you and I've already coached them up in the members class and given a gospel presentation. And they look at you and they can't get it out. I've had individuals that have been in Baptist churches for 40 and 50 years that could not even communicate the gospel. What is it? And that might be you today. And God's got you here to say no more.

You cannot plead ignorance and you shouldn't be ignorant of this message. If you believe it, and it's changed your life, why would you not want to know it and then let it be known to others? Right? It's so good. And so here it is. I think about it this way. God, man, Christ, and restoration.

God created everything. And I believe that literally in Genesis 1. He created everything. He created everything perfectly. He created Adam and Eve in his image. They were his image bearers.

And they were to worship him and love him and serve God. And God was their king. And he gave oversight. They were to be fruitful and multiply and create little worshipers.

But Adam and Eve sinned. They rebelled against God, the king, and said, we're going to come up with our own rules. And they disobeyed God and they sinned. And sin entered the world. And guess what else entered the world?

[18:50] Death. We call that the fall. The reason I'm losing hair and gaining wrinkles is because of the fall. And some of you too.

The reason there's cancer, the reason there's death, the reason that there's hurricanes and tornadoes and tsunamis and earthquakes and wars and famine is because of the fall.

That's the only thing that makes sense of this world is that there's been a fall. And we're living in a fallen world. It's because of sin. And so you stop there and go, man, there's no hope. I mean, we sinned against God. We've rebelled against him. He's holy. We're not holy.

Can we change it? No. We can't be good enough. We can't manufacture enough good works because all of our works is as filthy rags before our holy God. So what does God do in his divine grace and mercy from a heart of love?

He sent Jesus to be incarnate and to live the life that we cannot live, the down on the cross for our sins. He took the just wrath that we deserve and that he took our sins and he gave us his very righteousness so that we could be me right before holy God.

[19:59] That's salvation. That's the gospel. So there's man, there's Christ, there's God, there's man, there's Christ. But then the final part of the gospel is the restoration.

Jesus is coming back to restore all things, to make everything new. And the awesome thing is that he starts with his creation, you and me, and all of us have been born again.

We have been made new or being renewed day by day by the Spirit of God. He's already started that restoration. Here, I'm one of them and so are you that are in Christ. And so I just want to communicate that that's the gospel.

Is that the gospel you know, you believe, and you have trusted in? If it's not that, it's not the gospel. And so that's why it's important. If we are his empowered witnesses, we must have the right message.

And that's why it starts off that Jesus Christ showed himself and proved himself in their face. I am the resurrected Lord. I am the hope of the world. So because Christ is our risen Savior, another reason that we are his empowered witnesses is because Christ has given us his Holy Spirit.

[21 : 02] And we see that in verses 4 through 8. The acts, the work of God continues in acts through his church, that we are empowered by his Holy Spirit to continue what Jesus had started.

But I want us to see three things here. First of all, the power for witness is promised. You look at verses 4 and 5. He says, don't depart from Jerusalem. Don't go in and out like you've been doing. Stay right there because I've promised you that the Spirit of God is going to come. And we know on the day of Pentecost it came, right? And fire and clothing tongues and a great mighty wind that arrested the disciples and took charge of them.

And then Peter preached and 3,000 came to know the Lord. That this promise was given even in Ezekiel 36 and Jeremiah 31 and Joel chapter 2 that the Spirit was going to come and indwell God's people.

And he was going to indwell them to empower them to be on mission. See, Jerusalem was not their home. These were Galileans. But God says, I want you to stay in Jerusalem because right there where Christ was crucified, buried and resurrected, I want you to testify to who I am.

[22 : 10] And so the promise was given, but also the promise was kept. And we see that in the Scriptures. Verse 6 and 7, look at the power for witness is profound.

He says, so when they came together, they asked him, Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? So we're just working verse by verse here. And then verse 7, he said to them, it is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father is fixed by his own authority.

Jesus didn't rebuke them and say that Christ is not coming to restore Israel. He's just not coming to do it at that time. And in their patriotic zeal, thinking that the Spirit was going to come, immediately they were going to be empowered and Jesus was going to just take over and Israel would be the center of the universe and there would be this worldwide dominion.

That's what they desired. That's what they wanted. They believed. That's what even the Scripture says. And there are hints of that. When the Spirit comes, there will be this movement of God. But they said, will you restore Israel?

I think it indicates too small of a vision. That their hope is too small. They were wanting to go back to the old days of David. Are you going to restore us back the way we used to be?

[23 : 23] And God says, no, I ain't doing that. I'm going to do something above and beyond and more profound than that. I'm going to use you to reach the world. And maybe our vision, maybe our hope, maybe our confidence in God is that we think he can't use us ordinary people and use First Baptist Church to reach this community in the world.

Oh, yes, he can. And it takes faith and it has to be a life that knows the gospel and what God is up to because the Scripture tells us that we're not to pursue predictions.

We are to receive power of the Holy Spirit. And so Jesus says, hey, that's none of your business, but what I'm getting ready to do is going to be profound. It's something that you cannot even imagine.

So as we look at this power that is given to us, it's promised, it's profound, but also verse 8, which is really kind of the center point of this passage is that the power to witness is purposeful.

That this power, the presence, the person of the Holy Spirit in us is for a purpose. Look at verse 8. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.

[24 : 37] That the power of the Holy Spirit came for a specific task. Listen, that is to empower the church. The Holy Spirit regenerated you. The Holy Spirit baptized you into the church.

The Holy Spirit lives in you and is producing the fruit of the Spirit as you yield to him. The Holy Spirit is conforming you to the image of Jesus Christ. And listen, the Holy Spirit in you will move you if you will yield to him to be on mission every day to your family and friends and those that you know.

There's a major paradigm shift. When you read the scripture, especially in Isaiah, it gives us pictures that Israel or Jerusalem, really, the city, that there's one day where the nations are going to come to them.

Read Isaiah. At least four or five times it talks about the nations. But there's a paradigm shift with Jesus here. He is saying that there's going to be a shift of direction. Instead of people coming to Jerusalem, what's going to happen here when Pentecost happens, when the Spirit comes upon God's church and creates the church, is that you're not going to be a vacuum cleaner.

You're going to be a blow dryer. You're not going to be, come to me. You're going to be going to them. In fact, the healthiness of a church is not determined by how many people are coming, but

really every day how many people are going.

[25 : 54] And here, Jesus says you will receive power. And it's a power to go.

The Great Commission, go and make disciples. That's our mission statement. Make disciples of all people for God's glory. Your mission statement, what calibrates you and keeps you in line of where you want to go, and it's a good one, is that Pickens First Baptist Church exists to be a worshiping, evangelizing, learning, and loving family of faith to the glory of God.

And today, we're really emphasizing the evangelizing. You're learning. You probably don't need to work on that. You're loving. You've been nice to me today. You're worshiping.

We've worshiped the Lord and sang wonderful songs of the gospel. But evangelism, messengers of this good news, that's the purpose.

At least one of the major purposes of the Holy Spirit is dwelling you in me, that the Holy Spirit is missional. He's missional. So he's going to lead us to be on mission.

[27 : 06] But let's break down verse 8, and we'll move on. As we think about, because Christ has given us the Holy Spirit, first of all, we are evangelists. We are on mission. We're telling the good news.

And he mentions the Holy Spirit at least 62 times in the book of Acts. And most of it is dealing with apostles being empowered to preach the gospel.

That this responsibility to share the gospel to the world and even to go to the Himalayan mountains and up in valleys and hollers where nobody's ever heard the gospel and people to be saved there, that that has to be the power of God.

That what God has called us to do is insurmountable. Humanly speaking, there is no way that we can do it. But God has given us Himself, the Holy Spirit, to enable us to do that.

He says He's given us power. *Dunamis*, where we get the word dynamite. Explosive power. And I love in reading the book of Acts, there's four occasions where they spoke in tongues in the book of Acts, which I think proved that God was going from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, and the other most parts of the earth.

[28 : 13] But there's more times, at least seven times in the book of Acts, that they were filled with the Holy Spirit and they spoke or spake the word of God with boldness. Some of you are timid and backwards and don't like crowds and to talk to somebody and make somebody feel uncomfortable.

That's just not you. That's made a certain degree. But the Holy Spirit can make you bold. And you can say things that you never thought you could say if you'll let the Holy Spirit use you.

Trust Him to use you. I love what Bill Bright says. Witnessing is simply taking the initiative to share the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit and leaving the results up to God.

It's just leaving it up to Him. We're just seed sowers. Here's the good news and encouraging truth. All biblical evangelism is successful evangelism regardless of the results.

You can throw the seed out there and it might be on fertile soil and it might be on hard soil or the birds might come and snatch it away. But I want to tell you, if you sow the seed and the power of the Holy Spirit and leave the results up to God, you're prayerful about it, God will use it.

[29 : 19] I want to tell you, there was at least five or six people that sowed seed in my heart for several years. And it just bing, bing, just bounced off. But I want to tell you, over time, the Spirit of God cornered me.

And the Spirit of God at 8 before Lever Hall, as I read Genesis, never really read the Bible before, to be honest, and reading about Noah and the judgment of God. And with a girlfriend that witnessed to me, with a brother Greg, four years older than me, that's a pastor now, a witness to me, and with other people from Bob Jones that knocked on my door and shared the gospel with me at Clemson University, those seeds began to take root and the Spirit of God began to work and soften and regenerate my heart.

And I, by faith, repented of my sins and put my trust in Christ because I knew I was a sinner. And so we just share the gospel.

Is there any evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit at Crosspoint Church and here at First Baptist Church? Is there evidence? Are we doing things right now that we don't need the Lord's help? That we just know what to do and how to do it?

Or are we really dependent upon Him? Here's a quote that I take from a guy that preached at our church almost 12 years ago. He just said, And that just resounded with me.

[30 : 34] And if we know that people need to be saved and it's a supernatural work of God, then we must be a people who pray and ask the Lord. Because evangelism is empowered, will you believe God that He will use your life and your words to lead somebody to Jesus?

Do you believe He can use you to do that? You begin to pray about it and claim what you already have, the Spirit of God, the missional Spirit within you. You begin to pray and I guarantee you God will open doors.

But also evangelism is expected here. He says, And you will be my witnesses. Jesus expects evangelism of every Christian because the Spirit empowers every Christian to evangelize. All the gospels finished with a great commission were sent out. And I love it what he says here. And this is what stood out to me studying this passage just last week.

This is not a do-over sermon. This is fresh out of the bakery. Okay. He says, And you will be my witnesses. This is not an injunction.

[31 : 39] It's a description. Witness is not only what we do. It's who we are. We are. The noun. We are a witness.

And it's a verb. We are those who witness, who tell people about the resurrection of Christ. You are a witness.

An empowered witness if you belong to Jesus. So look at the opportunities around you. Begin to pray for your neighbors. Begin to care and then share the gospel.

Prayer, care, and share. We just had an equipped class on Thursday night about loving your neighbor. Jesus says, love your neighbor as yourself. Literally, love your neighbor. How can we love our neighbors?

By praying for them. By caring for them. And the greatest expression of love is to share the gospel with them. We had a lady in our neighborhood who's from China. Whose son tragically passed away.

[32 : 38] Who we had ministered to several years earlier. And got connected with the family through that. Came to church off and on. But then there was a couple of seasons. Did not. And then this tragic thing happened.

And we reached out to them. And she just grabbed on to Robin. And my wife is a great. My wife's an evangelist. She's a soul winner. And so we just loved on her.

Cared for her. Husbands hardened to the gospel. And we began to love and care for her. And walk through this death in the family. And her thoughts would be she'd just be mad and angry at God. But the Lord began to work through us. Just common, ordinary people. Neighbors. And one night while I was not there. In our small group she started to come.

She prayed to receive Christ. And we're seeing fruit. Need to continue to disciple. She needs, I think, to join our church. But I want to tell you. The statistic tells us every six months people go through crisis.

[33 : 42] I mean it could be your air condition go out and they're \$6,000. Right? So you can pray and care for them. You don't have to give them money. But you can use that opportunity in a creative way maybe to be able to share the gospel.

People go through crisis. They usually are more open. So be sensitive to that. How are you doing in the south? I'm doing all right. No, you ain't. If we were honest, we'd probably have a lot of conversations, wouldn't we, with people.

And so I just want you to prayer, have prayer, and there be care and sharing with your neighbor. Use those crises. Think about those in your concentric circles.

And then evangelism is expansive. We see really kind of a table of context in Acts 1-8. Jerusalem chapters 1-7. Judea and Samaria chapters 8-12.

And then we have the uttermost parts of the world or the earth, chapter 13-28. That the gospel went geographically, even racially, Jews and Gentiles and Samaritans and even theologically.

[34 : 41] We see from Acts 1-8 that the mission of Jesus is the world. And I'm so thankful for IMB, for all of our missionaries that we support that are on mission.

So we are empowered witnesses because Christ is our risen Savior, because Christ has given us the Holy Spirit.

And I promise the next two will be quick. Because Christ is our exalted Lord. Look at verse 9. 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.

Recorded in verse 12 of Luke and in Acts here as well, that Jesus ascended, he went into heaven. So where is Jesus right now? The Bible tells us he's at the right hand of the Father.

He was welcomed into the Father's presence. He is enthroned as our Lord. So why is this important? Because when we read Acts 1-8, we usually just kind of stop there.

[35 : 47] But the ascension is important to our mission. It has profound implications for us being witnesses. So let me give them to you.

This is just good theology. This is good Christology of who Christ is and what he's done. Why is it important that Christ is our exalted Lord? First of all, his ascension proved that his sacrifice was accepted.

Hebrews 1-3 says that Jesus made purification for our sins and he sat down at the right hand of the Father. It means job done. Salvation in no other name.

Jesus. His death is sufficient. Salvation is complete. Now people need to repent and trust in Jesus and his finished work. Also, Jesus' ascension had to happen for the Holy Spirit to come.

And we see that in Acts 2 and through the scriptures over and over. Jesus had to go to the Father's sin so that the Holy Spirit would come as we've been talking about. But here's one that really stands out that affects our mission.

[36 : 50] That Jesus' ascension means that he was exalted at the right hand of God. Peter, preaching on the day of Pentecost, said, This Jesus God raised up, and of that we are all witnesses, being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out on this that you see yourselves and are seeing and hearing today.

He's exalted at the right hand of God. It is a place of authority. It is a place of power. It is a place of honor. That the fundamental basis of all missionary enterprise is the universal authority of Jesus. That's why he said in Matthew 28, 18, All authority is given to me in, talk to me, heaven and on earth. We go, that's great.

He says, I'll never leave you. I'll be with you. Even in the scriptures there. So what does that mean? It means that Jesus is on the throne. And it means that we don't have the ability, but that Jesus has the ability to use us for his glory.

Listen, our ability to carry out the Lord's missionary mandate depends on the fact that Jesus is exalted to the right hand of God, where he possesses all power and authority. Only because all authority on earth belongs to Christ dare we go to the nations.

[38 : 14] And only because of authority in heaven that we have any hope of success. So when you're sharing the gospel and we're sending missionaries around the world and you're climbing up mountains at the Himalayas in India, we can know with confidence that God is able to save and that he has worked because he's at the right hand of Father who has the authority to give repentance and faith.

He is the one who's given us his spirit. And so he's in charge. The world's not in charge. Satan's not in charge. Jesus is in charge. He's the Lord of all. So we can go with confidence.

We can go with boldness. We can go to the darkest places and know that Christ, who is the light of the world, can change their lives. That's all I got to say about that.

So here, let me rehearse it again in the final one and we'll close out. And Fred will close us out. But we are empowered witnesses for Christ because Christ is our risen Savior.

Hallelujah. Because Christ has given us the Holy Spirit. Because Christ is our exalted Lord. But also because Christ is our soon coming King.

[39 : 32] See, we live between two advents. Jesus has come. And Jesus is coming again. So what do we do between the two appearances of Christ? We share the gospel.

We proclaim Christ. That we look back and we celebrate and we know what God has done and the work is finished on the cross for the salvation of men. But we look ahead knowing that Christ is going to come one day.

We're being pushed and we're being pulled by the gospel, the good news. And Jesus says that he's coming back. And even Peter said this to Cornelius in Acts 10, that Jesus Christ, whom God has exalted, is coming back to judge the living and the dead.

Jesus came the first time to be a Savior, to rescue us from our sins. But Jesus coming the second time to judge people of sin. He came and born in a manger, but he's coming again in the clouds.

And he's going to bring judgment upon the world. So that should move us to people who are under God's judgment to tell them about Jesus. That the second coming of Christ is not that we're thinking about predictions.

[40 : 39] We're letting it motivate us to be missional right now until Jesus comes or we draw our last breath. We are Christ-empowered witnesses.

Father, thank you for your mercy and your love and your grace in our life. We're thankful that you have saved us, that you have called us to yourself.

You've called us together. Ekklesia, a gathered people, even at Pickens First Baptist Church. And I pray, Lord, I know Fred's heart and his staff and many here is that they would continue to be faithful.

And even more in praying and giving and going here to cities and abroad. And I pray that you would stir them and stir me and stir Crosspoint Church and all of our church plants to be even more missional because of who you are and what you've done.

And we thank you for that. In Jesus' name, amen.