

Good morning! It's good to be here this morning. If I look a little tired it's because I have been in three states since dinner last night. I had the privilege of speaking at the Cru winter conference last night in Atlanta which sounds crazy to do that and preach the next morning in Oxford, I know. But the Lord so used that conference to shape the direction of my life fifteen years ago that I just couldn't pass up that opportunity. I'm also thankful for Clark Bartholomew agreeing to come home with me and keep me awake in the car at 2 am.

I remember going to back to FSU after that conference and one question kept coming up in the fraternity house, "How exactly did this happen?" The Sigma Chi house at FSU wasn't exactly a bastion of moral and theological fortitude. They would ask how did this happen and in the beginning I would just say, "I have no idea, you need to go talk to this guy on staff with Cru, he can explain it a lot better than I can."

But eventually, I stood up at my chapter meeting and answered *the* question. How did this happen? I say all this for a specific reason. The question, "How did this happen?", is the same question being asked in book of Acts. There is a guy named Theophilus asking Luke, "How did this happen? In just a short period of time, you Christians went from being a small insignificant Jewish sect to a new religion taking over the Roman Empire. How did this happen?"

And do you know what Luke's answer is? "Because Jesus said it would." That's the book of Acts in a nutshell: How did this happen? Because Jesus said it would. But in Luke's answer he tells us that Jesus had a very specific instrument he would use. He didn't just snap His fingers and convert millions all over Africa, the Middle East, Europe and Asia. He could have, he kind of did that with Paul. But He didn't. He started with a few and to these few, just before he ascended into heaven, Jesus said this: **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 to the end of the earth.**

That's Luke's thesis for the whole book of Acts: This is how it happened. Jesus said He would use a few witnesses filled with the power of the Holy Spirit to bring about the biggest change of course human history has ever or will ever know. Those witnesses would create more witnesses who in turn would create more witnesses in an ongoing process that will fulfill the Great Commission.

God uses power filled witnesses. So, this morning, I want to look at five things that we will have to know and embrace if we also are going to be witnesses.

I. You're never fully prepared.

Look at verse 6: **So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"**

And with this question, right off the bat we see the disciples totally blow it. They had been with Jesus everyday for three years and still didn't understand what he was coming to do. We can see this in the words 'restore' and 'Israel.'

They still thought Jesus was coming with an earthly kingdom. They thought He would displace their Roman occupiers and restore the nation of Israel to the glory it enjoyed during the reigns of King David and King Solomon. What they didn't realize is that Jesus was bringing something bigger. His Kingdom wasn't a restoration, it was a global expansion. It wasn't going to be defined by one ethnic group, but include every nation, tribe and tongue.

If you're like me, it's easy to think that you're not ready to be Jesus' witness. I don't know enough Bible, I'm still struggling with sin, I'm a relatively young believer. For all of us, it's easy to think, "I'm not ready yet." And you know what? You're not! I'm not! None of us will ever have enough knowledge, enough piety or enough eloquence to reason someone to Jesus. They are too far gone, too ravaged by sin for our eloquence and debating skills to save the day.

I want you to think for a second about our utter inability to carry out the task before us. Jesus isn't asking us to go out and change peoples' habits. He's not asking us to go out and change the way someone votes or make someone drink less or be more sexually responsible. Some of you probably could do that. Jesus, though, is asking us to change hearts. And changing hearts is beyond the ability of even the most gifted in this room.

I actually learned who Moses was as a missionary. Now, I really don't recommend that. I also don't want you to hear me say that growing in your knowledge of the Bible and your personal holiness doesn't matter. I have devoted years of my life to knowing the Bible and getting rid of sin in my life. These things matter greatly! But not as a starting point. If we wait until we feel fully prepared, we will never start.

If I would have waited until I felt fully prepared, I would never have gotten married, I would never have had any kids and certainly would have never tried to tell someone about Jesus. And clearly, here the disciples weren't 'fully' prepared because they don't even understand exactly what Jesus was coming to do. They just thought Jesus was bringing a return to the book of 2nd Samuel and 1st Kings.

The Bible says we are never fully ready. We need something we can't naturally muster up. We need something supernatural. Which leads me to my second point...

II. God gives us the power we need.

Look at the first part of verse 8: **But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you....**

For a split second I thought about making this the entire talk. There's so much here, but I won't. We are tasked to change hearts and God gives us a supernatural ability to carry that task out.

There is this often misunderstood verse in John 14 that says: **Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.**

People have tried to use this verse to say that we should be able to do more healing, more professing and more miracles in the physical realm than Jesus did. That's not at all what this verse is saying. Jesus' miracles were primarily in the physical realm and primarily to Jews. The promise isn't that we will do greater miracles in the physical realm, the promise is that we will do greater miracles in the spiritual realm and these miracles won't be limited to one ethnic group. And this is exactly what we see happening in the book of Acts.

Because Jesus went to the Father, we receive His Spirit who will empower us to literally do the impossible.... to heal blind eyes and change hard hearts. The power we are given is primarily for the mission.

One of the best pictures I have ever seen of this happened about ten years ago. I was on staff with Cru at Mississippi State and through a crazy set of circumstances found myself across the table at Starbucks from a guy named Cortez. Cortez is African American. He was a starting defensive lineman for the football team and he was about 10 times my size. Nothing in our culture would have pushed Cortez and me together.

But Cortez was about to be kicked off the football team and someone told him I might be able to help. He was a great athlete, but he had authority issues. So I talked with Cortez about Jesus. I explained what I knew from the Bible and what I had seen Him do in my life. We finished our coffee and met up again a week later. Cortez looked at me and said, "Somethings different with me Jim. I never read my Bible, but I just can't stop. I was reading about the Holy Spirit and it's kind of weird, but I think He's in me Jim. I was reading about what a wife needs to be and my girlfriend didn't match up, so I broke up with her. I read that we need to be able to explain the love in our hearts and I'm gonna need some help with that. Jim, my football team needs Jesus. We got some work to do!"

Five weeks later he was captain of the football team. He went to seminary and now he's on staff with Athletes in action and do you know what no one any where has ever said? Jim did that. Jim alone doesn't have that ability, but Jesus has given us a power that transcends all of our abilities. The Holy Spirit did that!

Bill Bright, the man who started Cru and known as one of the greatest evangelists of the 20th century was once asked if he had to choose between sharing the gospel with an unbeliever or explaining the power of the Holy Spirit to a believer, which would he choose? Without hesitation, he said, "The power of the Holy Spirit. If an unbeliever believes the gospel, great! One new believer in the Kingdom. But if a believer

understands the power they have been given in the Holy Spirit, that could result in hundreds of new believers in the Kingdom.”

You are never fully prepared, so God gives you the power you need. And when we have this power, we cease to be mere advocates for Jesus trying to reason someone into the Kingdom, but witnesses to the living power of Jesus inside of us transforming us into His image. We will speak as one who knows and is experiencing the immediate blessings of the Spirit of Christ living inside of us. And when that happens, then we are ready to witness.

So, what does this practically look like? How do we walk in this power? The disciples were believers at this point. They had the Holy Spirit at this point. So what exactly were they waiting for? They were waiting for the Holy Spirit to manifest Himself in their lives in a way that empowered them for the mission ahead. This is why you see Paul saying things to believers like “Be filled with the Spirit” or “walk in the Spirit.”

There is such a thing as believing in Jesus, but not being filled with His Spirit. There was an old British pastor named Martin Lloyd Jones who explained the difference like this. Imagine you are a child walking along holding your father’s hand. Things are good, you’re happy. You feel secure. In your mind, you know the father loves you. But there is no unusual urge to talk about it or tell others about it or to sing about it. It’s just true and nice.

But then your father suddenly surprises you...sweeps you into His arms hugging you and kissing you and whispering “I love you so much!” in your ears. Then he holds you back so he can look you in your eyes and says with his whole heart, “I am so glad that you are mine!” He then goes on hugging you with unspeakable warmth and affection. Then, finally, he puts you down and you continue to walk.

This is what happens when we are filled with the Holy Spirit. A nice walk becomes unspeakable joy and love. So much so that you can’t help but tell others about it. You can’t help but overflow with prayer and singing. The doubts you experience seem to just go away.

That’s what it means to be filled with the Spirit. And isn’t it easy to see how that power enables us fulfill the mission? The Holy Spirit isn’t given so that we can have a nice feeling. He’s given to us so that we will go on mission.

Are you filled? If you’re here and saying, “I want that Jim, How does that become true of me?” The answer is simple. It’s not easy, but it’s simple. Confess your sin, run from it and run to Jesus. And give control of your thoughts, actions, decisions and relationships over to God.

Confess sin, turn to Jesus. Confess sin, turn to Jesus. The more we do that, the more we are filled with His Spirit.

So, we're never fully ready, God gives you the power, and that power flows out of you in the form of action. Third point.

III. You will need to witness.

Now we get super practical. God gives us the supernatural power for success, but there is still something we need to do. Look at the rest of verse 8: **and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.**

What does it mean to be a witness? I want to break it into two parts. You have to see and you have to go and tell.

First, you have to see. Most of us, when we hear the word witness, we think about a courtroom. What is the basic requirement to be a witness in a courtroom? You had to see something! If you didn't see or experience something related to the case, you can't be a witness and it's the same with Christianity. So, the first question we need to ask ourselves is this: Have you seen Jesus? Are you experiencing Him through His Holy Spirit inside of you?

I'm not asking if you grew up in a Christian home. I'm not asking if you go to church or even if you read your Bible. All those are great blessings, but none of them are destinations. They are signposts pointing to Jesus.

If we have seen Jesus, there was a time when we realized that we are truly flawed to the core. Every part of us is diseased and the disease is sin. If we went outside and polled Atlanta and asked everyone to define sin, they would say things like stealing, cheating, killing and lying. But that isn't sin. Those are the symptoms of sin, but not sin. Sin runs much deeper.

Imagine you go to the doctor with a purple rash and the doctor grabs some cotton swabs and alcohol and begins to try and rub off the rash. What would you do? You'd get a new doctor! You know the rash itself is a symptom of a deeper disease and that is what you want the doctor to fix. The same is true of our sin.

The things we do are just the symptoms of a deeper disease the Bible calls sin. Sin at the core level is telling the God of the universe who created us, loves us and pursues us that we don't need Him. We want to be our own God. We want to make our own rules. We want to do what we want to do. If we don't see that, we have not seen Jesus.

If we have seen Jesus, we have seen our sin and we have seen that only Jesus offers us hope in our sin. Jesus came to live the life we need can and to switch places with us. He took on the just punishment for our sin and we get everything His perfect life merits. To see Jesus means seeing the depths of our sin and falling on our knees in the knowledge that Jesus is our only hope of restoration. Is that true of you? Have you seen Jesus?

So, first we need to see. Second, we need to go and tell. Jesus says that the gospel will go out like ripples in a pond. It will start in Jerusalem. Then it will go to the half Jewish people in the Judean Sumerian countryside. These were called the half breeds. So this gospel isn't only going to people who look, dress and talk like you. Through you it's going to go to people you not only don't understand, but maybe cultures you inherently dislike.

Then, finally, the gospel goes to the gentiles all over the empire. This is what Jesus said would happen and do you know what the rest of the book of Acts does? It shows this happening.

In chapter 2 the gospel goes to the Jews in Jerusalem accompanied by miraculous works, then in chapter 8 Philip proclaims the gospel in Samaria. In chapter 10 Peter takes the gospel to the gentiles and do you know where the book finishes? Rome. The gospel has taken over the whole empire.

Theopholis wants to know how this happened and Luke is saying, "Because Jesus said it would." He said we would be His witnesses from Jerusalem to Rome and here is the story of how that happened.

But the story isn't finished yet. There are billions of people either don't believe or have never heard and now we get to be a part of the greatest mission in world history. Where are you going to go?

Some of us are going to be called to to the unreached on the other side of the world, some of us are going to be called to the unreached on the other side of the campus and some of us are going to be called to the unreached on the other side of our home. Where you go is between you and God, but make no mistake, you are called to go.

And if the thought of going brings up any fear in your heart, you'll love my fourth point:)

IV. Being a witness will be scary

This is easy to overlook in this text, but it's important to see. 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.**

How do you think they felt at this moment? Go conquer the world! See ya! How do you think they felt? Confused? Maybe disappointed? Scared?

It was easy to be brave when they were looking at the risen Jesus walking through walls. Now He's gone..at least physically gone. And things just got real. If you are a believer in this room, there are people you want to share this gospel with, but the thought of doing it brings a real fear up inside you. Maybe it's a fear of being ostracized by your friends. Maybe it's a fear of being misunderstood by your family. Maybe some of

you feel called to go to another part of town or another country where there are real fears for your physical safety.

Now, I don't want to minimize any of these fears. Truthfully, the older I get the more fears I have to deal with. When I was 23, I prayed that God would martyr me. My wife hated it! Now, I have four little kids and I'm like, "Yeah, so I'm gonna have to stick around a little longer God." So I don't want to minimize or try and talk you out of your fears. I want to redirect them.

There are those out there who try and say that if we have enough faith, bad things aren't going to happen so there is no need to be scared. Well, what do you think the Apostle Paul would have said to that? Look at what he said in 2 Corinthians 11:

Are they ^bservants of Christ? ^cI am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, ^dfar more imprisonments, ^ewith countless beatings, and ^foften near death. ²⁴ Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the ^gforty lashes less one. ²⁵ Three times I was ^hbeaten with rods. ⁱOnce I was stoned. Three times I ^jwas shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; ²⁶ on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, ^kdanger from my own people, ^ldanger from Gentiles, ^mdanger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; ²⁷ ⁿin toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, ^oin hunger and thirst, often without food, ² in cold and exposure. ²⁸ And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for ^pall the churches. ²⁹ ^q

So the cure to fear isn't, have enough faith and nothing bad will happen to you. You do know Paul was beheaded at the end of his ministry, right?

Angela and I have a dear friend we used to live overseas with. A single girl about our age who is now doing ministry in arguably the most closed and most dangerous country in the world. The people group she is trying to reach is one of the most prolific exporters of terrorists in the world. She is one of three westerners who speak their language. Three! The authorities caught terrorists last year with videos of her on their phone as someone to kill. She prays for her safety, we pray for her safety, probably hundreds of people are praying for her safety, but her hope, like Paul's isn't in her safety and public acceptance.

So, what is her hope? What is the cure to our fear? Last point.

V. Jesus is coming back

Look at verses 10 and 11:

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."

So the disciples watch Jesus go up into heaven and two angels show up looking like men telling them that in the same way you are watching Jesus leave physically, one day He will return physically.

How does the knowledge that Jesus is coming back overcome the fear we experience in our call to witness? Because when Jesus comes back the mission is over. When Jesus comes back all opportunities to receive the grace He offers come to a halt. When Jesus comes back every knee will bow. Some will bow in love and some will bow in fear, but all knees will bow.

There is this interesting verse in John when Judas came with a band of Roman soldiers to betray Jesus and look what happens:

Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, “Whom do you seek?” They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth.” Jesus said to them, “I am he.” Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When Jesus said to them, “I am he,” they drew back and fell to the ground.

At the name of Jesus, every one of them was thrust to the ground. This is what will happen at the end. Jesus will come back and say, “I am” and it will be done. All will be finished. All of the human race will glorify God. Some as objects of His grace and some as objects of His wrath, but all will glorify Him.

Knowing that day is coming should reorient all that we do with our lives. It should reorient the way we spend our time. It should reorient the way we spend our money. And it should reorient what we say to people.

We witness because it matters. We could be the vessels God uses to ensure that on that day others will glorify God as objects of His grace, mercy and love.

Being a witness will be scary. It just will. But the importance and magnitude of our call overcomes that fear. We are not here to live a nice life. We are here to live a life that matters. We are here to be witnesses.

Conclusion:

So, where will you witness? I told you in the beginning of our time that when I was at FSU, eventually I had to stand up and answer the question, “How did this happen to Jim?” So, scared to death, I stood up in front of all my friends in this crazy fraternity house and I said, “Jesus changed me. I don’t know how else to explain it, but if anyone wants to study the Bible with me, I’d love some friends on this journey.”

Really, people looked at me like I had just announced I was becoming a woman. Do we support Jim in this? Do we confront him? Do we make fun of him? It was that weird. I had very little expectation that anyone would actually take me up on that invitation. But

the Holy Spirit did His work and so many people wanted to study the Bible that we had to start two different Bible studies.

Do you know why I was saved? Because Jesus said I would be. Do you know how those Bible studies got started? Because Jesus said they would. Do you know how the gospel took over the Roman Empire? Because Jesus said it would. Do you know why your life is going to matter? Because Jesus said it would.

Do you believe that He has more to say?

You are called to be a part of the greatest mission the world has ever known. You get to witness. Where will you go?