**November 27, 2022. Pastor James. The Kingdom Has Come.**

**Acts 1:1-8** *The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach,* *until the day when He was taken up to heaven, after He had given orders by the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom He had chosen.* *To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of things regarding the kingdom of God.* *Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, “Which,” He said, “you heard of from Me;* *for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” So, when they had come together, they began asking Him, saying, “Lord, is it at this time that You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?”* *But He said to them, “It is not for you to know periods of time or appointed times which the Father has set by His own authority;* *but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and Samaria, and as far as the remotest part of the earth.”*

Pastor James tells of being at an event where he was a nobody. A soldier was being honored with a Medal of Honor from a battle. People wanted to give testimony of what he had done. There were many who wanted to meet him and hear his stories of how he had saved others. One by one, stories were told of his selfless actions of saving others.

A witness is one who gives testimony to something significant that takes place. This medal was given based on many witnesses not just one testimony. It was evident that the words were true of this man. Others wanted to be near, be introduced, or to know this hero.

Such were the events surrounding Jesus. Jesus uses His final words on Earth to give instructions to be witnesses of Him. A few witnesses in the Old Testament were Israel, Moses, prophets, Isaiah..., then Jesus comes as the ultimate witness of God's plan. Jesus establishes Himself as the Way, the Truth and the Life, the Son of God, the Messiah, but He is killed and rises to spend 40 days with the disciples giving validity and witness to Himself. He tells the disciples they would be witnesses for Him in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the remotest parts of the world. Jerusalem represents home, Judea was their neighbors next door, Samaria was the people they didn’t like, and the remotest parts were the people they didn't know. This tells us we are to witness at home, to neighbors, to people you don't like, and people you don't know.

A witness cannot use hearsay. **Acts 19:13-16** *But also some of the Jewish exorcists, who went from place to place, attempted to use the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had the evil spirits, saying, “I order you in the name of Jesus whom Paul preaches!”* *Now there were seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, doing this.* *But the evil spirit responded and said to them, “I recognize Jesus, and I know of Paul, but who are you?”* *And the man in whom was the evil spirit, pounced on them and subdued all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.*

They cannot be proper witnesses because they didn't know Jesus nor had they experienced His power. To be a witness of Christ, we must know Him. No amount of cross examination can avert our testimony if we know Him. Is this a challenge? We want to give testimony of what God does in others (hearsay). Witness for Jesus cannot come apart from the power of the Holy Spirit. **Acts 1:8**but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth. The only one who can change death into life is the one who conquered death on the cross. If we are going to be witnesses to the power of Jesus Christ then we must experience the power of the Holy Spirit to give witness to what He has done. He died so that we could be conformed to Christ's likeness.

Evangelism is the mission of the church - to give witness to what God did but it does not happen without Spirit-filled, maturing, Christ-like believers. **Matthew 28:19**Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

What are the marks of an effective witness?

**1. Purity** is vital. Christ died for us to be dead to the flesh and reborn in Him. A Christian's downfall sometimes begins with a lack of humility as we become confident in our own abilities. We lack spiritual awareness and humility that allows God to speak to the conditions of our hearts. Once humility goes, then purity is soon to follow. If we are going to preach that Jesus came to remove our guilt, our sin, and our shame and to grant us righteousness, to make us holy and motivated for good works then it better be visible in our lives. If not, it destroys our witness. If we are preaching a gospel message of transformation, then we need to be the most transformed people on the earth. For some, transformation began and ended with salvation. We want to convince the world with our words instead of with our lives and it destroys our witness.

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Robert Murray M'Cheyne said, "It is not great minds, it is not great plans, it is not great ideas God uses. It is great likeness to Jesus Christ. A holy instrument is an awesome weapon in the hand of God.”

A holy life presents evidence of a changed life: a transforming gospel should produce transformed lives. We should constantly be changing to be like Jesus. The hindrance is humility (acknowledging our own areas of inconsistency) which produces a lack of purity. God will change what we surrender.

We have a responsibility to maintain purity in the church. It is our testimony to the validity of the gospel that we preach. We hesitate to address sin in others because we don't want to be judgmental or have our own problems. The Bible says we are to hold one another accountable.

**Acts 5** tells a difficult story about Ananias and Sapphira who wanted to look like the church in their generosity, but lied about what really was given. The Lord struck them dead. **Acts 5:4**Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.

**Ephesians 5:11**Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them. **I Timothy 5:20***Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning.* **Titus 1:13** This testimony is true. For this reason reprove them severely so that they may be sound in the faith. **Matthew 18:15-17** *If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.* *But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed.If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.*

God takes sin seriously. Purity is important to the message of the Gospel. The Bible is clear about our responsibility to one another, to draw one another back to living in purity so that we represent Jesus well to the world around us. Our witness is effective when we live the Book in our words and our actions.

**2. Power. Acts 1:8** *Y*ou will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. Without the power of the Holy Spirit, we will rely on our own abilities to do the right thing or to change. We cannot transform without the power of the Holy Spirit. **John 15:1-6***I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit.* *You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.* *Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me.* *I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.*

We are not capable to make transformation in our lives without abiding in Christ. All of the knowledge in the world has no ability to save us. It's not about trying harder. The only way to live a transformed life is to submit our lives to Jesus Christ and to the power that He provides through His Holy Spirit. To experience the power of the Holy Spirit is to seek it with all of our hearts and open our mouths in faith to who He is. When we open our mouth, He fills it.

**3. Persecution** is inevitable. Persecution is predictable. We cannot be effective in evangelism unless we anticipate persecution. **Acts 5:17-32** The disciples were put in prison for their witness; an angel gets them out and tells them to go back and preach the gospel. They went back out; they were not hiding; they were not running; they began preaching in public but the persecution continued. Persecution is more evidence that you are doing right than doing wrong.

**Proverbs 28:1** The righteous are as bold as a lion. Being a witness for Christ is giving testimony to what He has done in our lives. Jesus called us to be witnesses to His gospel. Sometimes fear holds us back. Everyone has things that are wrong. We are not alone so... will we be honest? Let's allow the Holy Spirit to do what we cannot. Purity leads to freedom. Purity of heart will produce a purity of words and actions. Let's begin to be willing to step out and acknowledge places in our hearts that God still needs to deal with. Our testimony begins right here with us humbling ourselves.

If you had to give testimony to what God has done this last week, what would it be? Would there be a recognition that God is involved where you are? Have bondages been broken in the last week? Do our words give witness to Christ? Has there been transformation in our lives? Integrity? Purity?