

You Will Be Witnesses (Part 3)

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[0:00] As I've done every Sunday morning for this month, and this being the last Sunday of the month, I want to share with you the last portion of our strategy, our mission strategy.

! And I began with two key passages of Scripture. The first one is, and both are familiar, the first one is, And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, All authority has been given to me in heaven and in earth.

Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.

And then this promise, And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen. That's the Great Commission. The second passage that fits with our theme, and that would be Acts chapter 1 and verse 8.

But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem and all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

[1:28] And we've taken that passage, and I think rightfully so, and I'll say more about this just in a little bit. We've taken that strategy, or excuse me, that verse as a strategy.

And it is a strategy. We might call it the broad outline of a strategy for missions. To go to each of these areas.

Now, each of these areas stands for a part of our world. And it begins, first of all, with our Jerusalem.

I shared that with you several Sundays ago. Our Jerusalem is Bartlesville. And we could add to that our close community, Dewey.

And I shared with you a number of areas where we need to connect to missions, to be missional. Places we can go right here in the city limits of our own community, as well as Dewey.

[2:31] And then we move out from there to our Judea. And our Judea is, of course, Oklahoma. It fits very well.

That's our state. This is where we live. Or where Bartlesville is located. And where we are in association with a number of churches throughout our state.

And together we call ourselves a convention. And there are many opportunities right here in our own state to be on mission, to go. But our commitment to the Great Commission doesn't end with our state or our Judea.

We move out from there to our Samaria. And our Samaria is our continent. North America. And I, again, named a number of places that we want to be connected to.

To partner with. And where we can go, actually go. And be a part of missions. And then, this morning, the final scope of our missions takes in the entire world.

[3:40] And so, we're to go to the ends of the earth. Our world. And what will that include? Well, a number of things.

And even before I share some of these, you're going to be thinking, now, wait a minute. How in the world can we? We're just a small church.

How can we be involved in all of these things? Well, we can be. And we must be. The first thing we can do, other than pray, is to give.

And you know that every Christmas, every Christmas season, we give our Lottie Moon Christmas offering. Our missions offering. You may or may not know.

You should know if you're Southern Baptist. And that's what we are. It would be inconceivable for any of us in this room. Except maybe our Wesleyan brother and his family.

[4:43] But even you probably know about our Lottie Moon Missions offering. And this offering that we take every year. And we're just about to enter into that season. Goes to support our Southern

Baptist missionaries.

Some 5,000 plus that are located all around our world. And we give that offering. And ask God to bless it.

And through that offering and that support, the gospel is proclaimed to the world. And so in that sense, when you give that penny or dollar or ten dollars or however much it is, it is a part of you going.

And you're not going personally and in your body. But you are helping those who can go where you cannot go. To go where you will never go.

To go to missionaries that are incarnational. Those who live right there. And share the gospel of Jesus Christ. The second thing that's a part of our going is something you heard a little bit about this morning.

[5:53] The voice of the martyrs. Say, how can we go in that sense? Well, we can go by supporting their ministry and that ministry being to the persecuted church around this world.

We heard a little bit about that this morning. And just a little bit. And what a tremendous story of these three pastors. And we could multiply that by thousands and thousands in those countries where the gospel is restricted.

And where those who are themselves fulfilling the Great Commission are under tremendous persecution. And so we want to be a part of what Voice of the Martyrs is doing.

We can do that in a number of ways. We can certainly pray for that ministry and pray for the persecuted church. We can give of our resources, our finances, and be a part of that work in that way.

We can volunteer and be right here. And we're privileged to have VOM right here in our own community. And be volunteers to help them with the work.

[7:03] Whether it's helping them in sending out materials and in a host of other ways. We can also go sometimes where the opportunity is there to some of these restricted countries.

To be an encouragement to the pastors and to the Christians that are living there and serving there. The third thing in our go-to-the-world is Malawi.

And you probably know, and if you were here three Sundays ago when Brother Paul was here and preaching, he also shared with us some of the vision of our local association, Washington Osage Baptist Association.

And he mentioned then the partnership, the ongoing partnership between our association and Malawi. And a number of short-term trips have been made to that country, to this last year, to a place that has never even seen a white man or a woman from America.

And the tremendous, I wish that he had had more time to share with us the tremendous things that God did through that trip. Well, there will be opportunities for us to connect with Malawi.

[8:23] And for some of you, as God leads you and makes the resources available for you, to actually go with one of these groups to Malawi.

The third, or fourth rather, thing that we want to partner with is something that our state convention, our Oklahoma Baptists, have just started this last year.

And that is a partnership with East Asia, which includes a number of countries. China would be one of them, Korea, Japan, and several others. About six in all, I believe.

And there will be opportunities even this coming year. And in the years that follow, as this partnership continues, for us to be a part of some short-term mission projects to one of the countries in East Asia.

And I envision, dear people, opportunities for young people, our youth to be a part of these kinds of trips, our adults, our single adults.

[9:32] I could see our singles coming together and say, we're going to do a short-term mission project to one of the countries in East Asia that's sponsored by our convention.

Finally, Ukraine. And this partner is not really a partnership that our association has started or our state convention, but it's something that I bring with me as your pastor.

For a number of years, I've been and my family has been involved in short-term trips to Ukraine, and we've had tremendous experiences there, working with some of the small churches in the countryside there in Ukraine.

And I would say to you that Ukraine is not one of those restricted countries. The gospel can be shared there relatively freely, and as the years go by, it becomes easier and easier.

And it is so wide open for evangelism, for the gospel in Ukraine. And my particular heartbeat is for the Baptist Seminary in Odessa, Ukraine, and have a connection with them and opportunities in this next year and in the years to come to be a part of something there in the way of teaching there at Odessa, but also for all of us or any of us that want to be a part of it, opportunities to do some short-term mission projects with the pastors of some of the students there at Odessa Baptist Theological Seminary.

[11:19] So here it is. And God may open the door for a number of other areas in our world where we can connect and actually go and be a part of the Great Commission in our world.

Amen? This is a big, ambitious strategy. And when you add all of these together from our Jerusalem, Judea, our Samaria, our world, when you put all of that together, you're going to think, man, this is a big deal.

And how can we do this? Well, we can. We can do that. And primarily because of the first thing that I shared with you on that first Sunday this month and what I want to share with you again as we go further in our consideration of an example of the Great Commission that we find in Acts chapter 1. So if you take your Bibles and turn to Acts chapter 1 and find verse 7. I'm going to read verses 7 and 8. Acts chapter 7.

This series of messages that I've been preaching simply entitled, You Shall Be Witnesses. Not very creative. Comes right out of the text.

[12:51] Guys, if you'd flash that. Thank you. Here's what Luke wrote as he was inspired by the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts chapter 1, verse 7.

And he said to them, It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in his own authority, but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.

All right? So there it is. Now, I read a portion of that a little while ago. So this is the Great Commission, a commission that is given to the church. It's one of at least four clear records of Jesus' commission to his disciples, but through them to his church.

That includes us right here. Now, we've been looking at this for the last three Sundays. I skipped a Sunday. So three Sundays in all, we've been considering this passage.

And now we've come to the last Sunday of the month and my last sermon in this passage. And what have we learned about the Great Commission work of the church?

[14:09] Hopefully, we've learned a lot. And hopefully, we've been challenged. But let me just review a couple of things. First of all, we've learned in order to be effective communicators of the gospel of Jesus Christ, we must, first of all, rely upon the source of Great Commission work.

And Jesus tells us the source. He says, you shall receive power, power, when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.

And we spent a little time talking about that word power. And noted that it is the Greek word *dunamis*. And rather than us thinking in terms of dynamite, which, by the way, is the word, our word dynamite comes from.

But rather think of it in these terms, dynamic. We could even use the word effective. And so here's the source of our Great Commission work, a source that we must absolutely rely upon, and that is the Holy Spirit.

Now, when Jesus, again, shared this with His disciples as a part of His commissioning of them, the Holy Spirit had not yet come. Not in the sense that it would come on the day of Pentecost.

[15:27] But we live on this side of Pentecost. And so the Holy Spirit has come. And the Holy Spirit not only indwells the church, but more specifically indwells every born-again believer.

And so the promise is clear. And it is something we must rely upon. And that is the power, the effective, the dynamic power of the Holy Spirit.

And so in order to be effective communicators of the gospel of Jesus Christ, we must rely upon the source of Great Commission work. Secondly, we saw this last Sunday, we must recognize the substance of Great Commission work.

We must recognize the substance of it. Now, what did Jesus say? He says, You shall be witnesses of Me.

Of Me. And so, you see, they're clear. The substance of our Great Commission work is Jesus Himself. It's not anything else.

[16:37] It is Jesus and Him alone. When Paul said, He said and He declared, I know nothing save Jesus and Him crucified.

And that is the substance of our Great Commission work. We're not going to go to Bartlesville or Dewey or any points in Oklahoma or any points on our continent or anywhere in our world with any other message other than Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

And so this is the substance of our Great Commission work. Now, as we wrap up our missions emphasis and as I conclude this series of sermons, I want to share with you three more points of instruction from this passage.

To be an effective communicator of the gospel, we must, number three, receive the singular sense of Great Commission work.

We must receive the singular sense. Now, I just mentioned it a moment ago and we talked about it or I spoke of it at length last Sunday, but we considered an important personal pronoun last Sunday that appears here in this text that is in reference to the substance of our Great Commission.

[18:06] We talked about that already and I just alluded to it again. But, you know, the word me is not the only personal pronoun in the Great Commission.

Can you identify another there? How about you? It is the word you. You. And, by the way, it appears four times in this passage.

Look at it. Verse 7, it is not for you to know the times or seasons. Verse 8, but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.

There it is again. And you shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and the uttermost part of the world. So, four times we find that personal pronoun you in the text.

And I would have you know that the pronoun you appears in the plural form every single time but one time.

[19:13] And so, one out of the four, the personal pronoun you appears in the singular. And I think this is significant.

Jesus said, you shall be witnesses to me. And it's not plural. It's singular. Now, that does not mean that Jesus is suggesting that we're not to come together and associate together and partner together and to think of our Great Commission work in the plural sense.

Because, by the way, the word you does appear in the plural in the text. It's not that we're not to form associations of churches and denominations.

This is not a case against denominations doing Great Commission work. But it is to tell us that, first of all, we are to understand that the Great Commission has been given to us, each of us, individually.

We need to receive the singular sense of it. And so, Jesus says, as His disciples are gathered there and He's giving His Great Commission to them, He says, as if He's looking at each one of them individually and saying, You, you shall be my witness.

[20:43] And so, when we bring that text into our day, and it needs to be brought to our day. It was intended to be brought into our day and to be made personal for us, each of us.

Then, when we bring it into our day, it is as if Jesus is looking at each one of us. And I would say, first of all, it's as if He's looking at me. And looking at me eye to eye and face to face.

And you need to think of it in those same terms. That is, it's as if Jesus is looking at you eye to eye, face to face.

And He's saying, you, and you, and you, and you, and you, and you, and you, and you shall be, will be my witness.

Each one of you. You see, we need to receive this commission as a personal commission. First and foremost.

[21:51] It's awfully easy to get kind of lost and hidden in the group. And not ever personally connect to the great commission or personally obey His commission.

And it is a point of obedience, isn't it? Easy to kind of get lost in the group. And hide in the group. But Jesus says, each one of you.

We need to receive this commission in the singular sense. It's a personal commission. We need to receive it as a singular command. That Jesus is issuing to each and every one of us.

Receive the singular sense of the great commission. Fourth. To be effective communicators of the gospel, we must reach for the full scope of great commission work.

We must reach for the full scope of it. And again, and I'm sorry if it seems I'm belaboring the point, but we need to get this. Jesus said, you shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem.

[22:59] And by the way, the next word is not or. It's and. And in all Judea. And Samaria. And to the end of the earth.

That means we're to be involved in all of these areas. See, I believe Jesus is describing for us, or did describe for us, the scope of our great commission work.

And he describes it in terms of four ever widening circles of witness. Now, I would say to you that traditionally, because this is not an idea that I just came up on my own.

But traditionally, the church has taken Jesus' words as a divinely mandated strategy for reaching the world with the gospel. We always go to Acts 1.8.

Here's the strategy. And it's divinely mandated because it is a command. And so we have traditionally taken it that way. But is there any biblical basis upon our taking it that way?

[24:05] Well, how about the book of Acts itself? The book of Acts reveals to us that the apostles took Jesus' words as a strategy.

You say, how so? Well, you remember that the full title of this book is the Acts of the Apostles, right?

In fact, your copy of Scripture would most surely put that in there. The Acts of the Apostles. And so it's the history of the early advances of the gospel through the work of the apostles and their close associates.

That's what we have in the book of Acts. Now, Jesus said right there in the first chapter, you shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and the uttermost part of the world.

And that is exactly what the apostles did. Now, grant you, they had to be nudged along quite a few times. And so do we.

[25:04] But that's exactly what they did. In fact, if you were to read chapters 1 through 7 in the book of Acts, you would discover that it's all about Jerusalem. And then when you start in chapter 8 and go out from there all the way to chapter 12, it's all about Judea and Samaria.

And then when you get to chapter 13 and go on to the end of the book of Acts, it's all about the end of the earth. And so Luke took this commission literally as he outlined his book.

But he didn't just dream this up and manipulate the histories. This is exactly how it happened. Step by step from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria and to the end of the earth.

And then Luke closes this book with this phrase. He says, Preaching the gospel, the kingdom of God, and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding.

Or literally, it's the word unhinderedly. I mean, Luke just leaves an adjective out there at the end of the book of Acts.

[26:16] Meaning it's going on and on and on to the ends of the earth. And here's my point. Highland Park Baptist Church must reach for the full scope of the Great Commission.

Our Jerusalem, yes. Bartlesville, we know that, don't we? But not just that. Our Judea, our state convention. And not just our state, but our continent, Samaria.

And not just here on our continent, but to the ends of the earth, to our world. And so our Great Commission strategy must reach to each of these four areas.

And so we must go here, yes. And I would even argue that the lion's share of the resources that God blesses us with should go here.

And the lion's share of our direct efforts should be here. But not just here. To the end of the world. When you leave here this morning, there'll be some men stationed at each door.

[27:20] We're not ready to go yet, so just hold on. But they'll be stationed out here and they're going to give you this little kind of booklet. And this booklet will provide a visual for everything that I've shared with you this entire month.

All those key areas of missions, our strategy of missions. And so you'll be picking one of those up as you go out. And one per household, okay?

And when you look at that, you get it home and you look at it, you're going to be thinking, We can't do all this. Pastor, what are you thinking?

It's just far too ambitious. You might catch yourself thinking that. You might be thinking, you know, we're not a big church. How can we do all of these things?

But here's what you should be thinking. All right? You should be thinking, first of all, that obedience to the Great Commission requires that we, the local church, we call ourselves Highland Park Baptists, that we must commit to the full scope of the Great Commission as Jesus laid it out for us. [28:40] That's what you ought to be thinking, first of all. That this is what God calls us to. And I would say to you that this is one of the strengths that we have as Southern Baptists.

See, our denomination is not the church. We are. The commission has been given to us. And to every local body of believers, many of them located right here in Bartlesville. And hundreds and hundreds in our state. Thousands upon thousands in our nation. And who knows how many in our world. Great commission has been given to us.

We're the church. And it is the responsibility of each local body of believers to obey the Great Commission. That's what you ought to be thinking when you look at this.

Okay? But not only that, you ought to be thinking a second thing. And that is, you know, you need to be thinking, I need, personally, I need to commit a portion of my time and resources to every aspect of this strategy.

[29:59] My time and resources to Jerusalem. I ought to be looking here at Judea and see, Well, what would God want me, personally, to commit to in my Judea and also in my Samaria and in my world?

And my encouragement to you is this. You can, each of you, individually. You can make a commitment to each of those four areas.

You say, Pastor, I can't go to another foreign country. I can't travel like that. But you can do something else. See, we all need to commit, each of us individually, to a particular area in each one of those four.

And I would even go so far as to say to you and challenge you that when it comes to our Bartlesville, all of us need to commit to more than one thing.

In our commitment to reach the people who are right here in the shadow of our church. You ought to be thinking that. And there's a third thing you ought to think. You ought to be thinking that God's presence depends upon our full obedience to this commission.

[31:25] His presence. Our commitment to his commission will bring his presence into our church. You remember what Matthew 28, 19, what Jesus said there?

He said, Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations. And then he said, And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

And one more thing you ought to be thinking. You ought to be thinking that this indeed is ambitious. Yes. But if God wants our church to do this, he will provide the people and the resources to do it. You ought to be thinking that. In Luke chapter 10 and verse 2, you don't need to turn to it, but Jesus sent out his disciples two by two.

And he admitted to them. He said, The harvest truly is great. But the laborers are few. He admitted that to them. The laborers are few.

[32:34] But he sent them nevertheless. And he did not limit his commission based upon the limited number of laborers.

Instead, he said, next, he said, Therefore, pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. That's what we ought to be praying.

And here's my point. I believe God will grow our church based upon our commitment to his great commission. Not based upon the number of need and innovative programs that we might develop. But based upon our commitment to his commission. God will bless us and grow us. I'm not talking about the results of our going.

I'm not talking about that. Certainly, when we tell people about Jesus Christ and plead with him, invite them to repent and trust him as their savior. Some people are going to be saved. God's gracious to save people.

[33:36] And our church will grow. But I'm not talking about that. I'm believing that God will grow our church in order that we can do what he's commanded us to do.

Do you understand? That is, if we're committed to doing what he has commanded us to do. God will grow our church based upon that. And when he sees our commitment to reach for the full scope of the great commission, he will send us more laborers in order to do that work.

Conversely, if we have no real commitment to his commission. To stretch ourselves to the full scope of it.

We have no real commitment for that. Why should he grow us? Why should he do that? I don't think he will.

I need to wrap this up this morning because we're bumping the time. One final thing. To be effective communicators of the gospel, we must respond to the season for great commission work.

[34:59] Respond to the season. I want you to notice something. I did not read verse 6, but I want to now. Would you look there at verse 6 in Acts chapter 1? This explains why he answered the way he did in verse 7.

Therefore, when they had come together, they asked him, saying, Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom of Israel? And he said to them, it is not for you to know times or seasons which the father has put in his own authority.

But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you shall be witnesses.

This is interesting. The apostles asked this question or inquired of him.

Is this going to be the time? And they really didn't know what they were asking. They didn't really understand what it all meant. But they were basically asking, is this the end of the age?

This is the end of it. Is this the consummation of God's redemptive purposes? However, they understood that. That was the question.

[36:07] And Jesus responded, it's not for you to know that season. It's not for you to know that. He's not for you to know that season.

And the implication is, by what he says next, that we, they and we are to set our focus on this season. The season we've been given right now.

And this is the season of the gospel, the season of the church, the season of his grace, the season of great commission work. We're to set our focus on the things pertaining to the present season.

Like the old, old, old, old hymn says, and probably some of you have never heard it. Here's one line from this old hymn. We'll work till Jesus comes.

And we'll be gathered home. But the first part is work till he comes. Then we'll be gathered home.

But right now, the season is go.

[37:13] Go and make disciples of all nations. And lo, I will be with you even to the end of the age. I want to close by reading a parable to you.

And it's not a parable out of the Bible, okay? It's a parable written, by the way, by a Presbyterian. I believe he was a pastor, but he was a Presbyterian.

That I do know. And the title of the parable is the parable of the fishless fishermen. Here's how it goes. Now, it came to pass that a group existed who called themselves fishermen.

And lo, there were many fish in the waters all around. In fact, the whole area was surrounded by streams and lakes filled with fish. And the fish were hungry. Year after year, these who called themselves fishermen met in meetings and talked about their call to fish, the abundance of fish, and how they might go about fishing.

Continually, they searched for new and better definitions of fishing. They sponsored costly nationwide and worldwide congresses to discuss fishing and to promote fishing and hear about all the ways of fishing.

[38:29] These fishermen built large, beautiful buildings called fishing headquarters. The plea was that everyone should be a fisherman and every fisherman should fish. One thing they didn't do, however, they didn't fish.

They organized a board to send out fishermen to where there were many fish. The board was formed by those who had the great vision and courage to speak about fishing, to define fishing, and to promote the idea of fishing in faraway streams and lakes where many other fish of different colors lived.

Also, the board hired staffs and appointed committees and held many meetings to define fishing, to defend fishing, to decide what new streams should be thought about.

But the staff and committee members did not fish. Expensive training centers were built to teach fishermen how to fish. Those who taught had doctorates in fishology.

But the teachers did not fish. They only taught fishing. And year after year, graduates were sent to do full-time fishing, some to distant waters filled with fish.

[39:37] Further, the fishermen built large printing houses to publish fishing guides. A speaker's bureau was also provided to schedule special speakers on the subject of fishing.

Many who felt the call to be fishermen responded and were sent to fish. But like the fishermen back home, they never fished. Some also said they wanted to be part of the fishing party.

But they felt called to furnish fishing equipment. Others felt their job was to relate to the fish in a good way so the fish would know the difference between good and bad fishermen.

After one stirring meeting on the necessity of fishing, a young fellow left the meeting and went out fishing. The next day, he reported he had caught two outstanding fish.

He was honored for his excellent catch and was scheduled to visit all the big meetings possible to tell how he did it. So he quit his fishing in order to have the time to tell about the experience to the other fishermen.

[40 : 41] He was also placed on the fisherman's general board as a person having considerable experience. Now, it's true that many of the fishermen sacrificed and put up with all kinds of difficulties.

Some lived near the water, bore the smell of dead fish every day. They received the ridicule of some who made fun of their fishermen's clubs and the fact that they claimed to be fishermen yet never fished.

They wondered about those who felt it was of little use to attend the weekly meetings to talk about fishing. After all, were they not following the master who said, Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.

Imagine how hurt some were when one day a person suggested that those who didn't catch fish were really not fishermen. No matter how much they claimed to be.

Yet it did sound correct. Is a person a fisherman if year after year he never catches a fish?

[41 : 49] Thank you.