

**Acts 1: 6-14; “Becoming a Better Witness”, Sermon # 2 in the series –
“Laying the Foundations”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall
on January 18th, 2015, in the Morning Worship Service.**

One of the greatest things that a Christian is called to, when they come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, is to be a witness. It is interesting to me how many Christians think that being a witness for Christ is something that they might become, if the Spirit happens to move them, or if someone would teach them some technique on how to share the gospel. But they do not realize that when they become a Christian, that they are already witnesses, from that point forward, their whole life through. You who believe in Jesus are witnesses to Him, every day, in the way that you speak, and the way that you live, before other people. When you first receive Christ, you receive the Holy Spirit. After you have believed in Christ, you are sealed with the Holy Spirit, and you are baptized into the body of Christ, His Church. From that moment on, you are a witness to all that He has done for you, and all that He has given to you, and indeed all that He will give to you and do for you in the future. As much as you know from the Bible, and from personal experience, this is what your witness will be. A witness is one who tells others the truth about what they know about God and Christ, and the thousand subjects which relate to knowing God. The Apostles already were Christ’s witnesses before Pentecost, but they were going to become much better witnesses on the Day of Pentecost; and afterwards in their labors with the gospel, and in shepherding Christ’s sheep. In verse 5 our Lord was very definite about this truth of their being witnesses, and becoming better witnesses, when he declared to them in verse 5: “You shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” And here in verse 8 He says, “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.” Those three “shalls” show us that these Apostles were most definitely to be His witnesses from that Day of Pentecost, forward, in a greater sense as His Church, than they already presently were as individuals.

And what we can most definitely conclude from 1 Corinthians 12: 13, in relation to this, is that since we who believe are baptized with the Spirit at our conversion to Christ, and placed into Christ’s mystical body the Church; we also are witnesses, whether we realize it or not. We really are His witnesses now because we have been baptized. “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink of the one Spirit.” In my last sermon to you, I told you that the Holy Spirit has been doing His good work of regeneration in the hearts of all of God’s Elect, in both in Old Testament times and New. He did not begin that gracious work at the Day of Pentecost. He began it when they first believed in Him. You cannot savingly believe in the promises of God concerning Christ, without the work of the Holy Spirit changing and regenerating your heart. I showed you in my last sermon that the beginning of the formation of the New Testament Church started when Christ called His Apostles. He then taught them for 3 and a half years, concerning truth and righteousness and about His kingdom, and then at the end of that time, He laid down His life for them, and for all of God’s Elect, at the cross. Then when He rose from the dead, He commissioned His Apostles in relation to their work of building upon the foundation which He laid with these words from John 20, verse 21 – “Peace to you!” “As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” “And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’ “If you forgive the sins of any they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.” They had already known the Spirit’s work of regeneration upon their hearts several years before. They had already confessed Jesus as the Christ, when Peter made his declaration in Matthew 16, when he said that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

But now, here, another step was being taken. The New Testament Church was being formed, and Jesus was breathing the breath of life into His mystical spiritual body the Church, to form them even as He formed Adam in the garden in the creation. So what I want to speak to you about this morning is your being and becoming a better witness for Christ. What will it take for you and me to become better witnesses for Christ? I think that it will take 3 things. It will take 1st – Remembering that it takes the power of the Holy Spirit to become a better witness. 2nd – Remembering where Jesus is presently and that He is coming back again. And 3rdly – Remembering to pray and to be of one accord with the brethren in your church. Let’s pray to be able to grasp these realities and live them out together.

1st – To become a better witness for Christ will require that you remember that it takes the power of the Holy Spirit to do so.

(Verses 6 – 8)

“Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, ‘Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to 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 to Me in Jerusalem, and I all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” The Apostles had still cherished the hope that they themselves would not have to do anything dangerous or difficult to promote the kingdom of God and their Savior. They fondly dreamed that He would restore the kingdom to Israel and they would sit upon 12 thrones next to His throne, and that He would then immediately judge the enemies of the true Israel, and set up the eternal kingdom right then and there. But this is not what the Father intended. I hope that you can see very plainly that it takes power, the power of the Holy Spirit, to be an effective witness to the Lord Jesus. It takes more than just our own natural abilities to become a witness to our Lord. It even takes more than having a gift of preaching and teaching. You have been given light, but that light cannot be placed under a bushel basket. It must be set upon the lampstand, so that it give light to all around. You have been given the Spirit if you are a true Christian. But you still need the manifestation of His power to become a light to others. Even as Christ was sent by the Father into this fallen world of sin and misery, so Christ sent the Apostles. Christ was full of the Holy Spirit and of power. This was what enabled Him to fulfill the mission which He came to do. He was sent in the power of the Spirit and so He spiritually sends us. But we need to be clothed with power to see anything done to promote His kingdom and His glory. All power that we might have, to be and to become a witness, came from Him originally. He gives power to fulfill His purpose in the salvation of people’s souls.

Turn to Isaiah Chapter 49 and you will see this. In verse 5 it says, “And now the Lord says, Who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, to bring Jacob back to Him, so that Israel is gathered to Him (For I shall be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and My God shall be My strength), indeed He says, ‘It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.’” These verses are referring the Lord Jesus Christ, Who would become the Savior to both Jews and Gentiles. He would become light to them. He would become a witness to them. But how, to the “ends of the earth?” Well turn over to Acts Chapter 13 and you will see where it all began. “Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.” “As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ “Then, having fasted, and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.” Now watch this. “So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.” You see here that it was the

Holy Spirit who called these men to their work in missions. It was the Lord who set them apart to it. They knew the Great Commission was the commandment of the Lord. But they also knew that if the Holy Spirit sent them on this mission, that He would be with them in it, in a special way, to bring about results in their work. All of you who are Christians, who want to become a better witness, you need to take note of this. You have the Great Commission given to you, also, and yet it will take more than your going about to fulfill it in the power of your own determination, in order for you to see results for good and for God's glory. It will take the power of the Spirit.

Now turn over to verse 42 of Acts Chapter 13. Here Paul has been preaching a powerful sermon to the Jews in the synagogue of Antioch Pisidia, showing them that Jesus Christ was their promised Messiah. He is telling them that they ought to believe in Him because He was raised from the dead. He warns them that they should beware of not receiving his message of having faith in Christ, lest this great salvation offered to them in the gospel would not reach their heart, so that they would be truly saved. It says, "So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath." "Now when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. They persuaded them, but it was by the power of the Spirit that these were convinced. "On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God." "But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul." "Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, 'It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles.'" Watch this now. "For so the Lord commanded us: 'I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, that you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.'" "Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord." "And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed."

You see, the Holy Spirit was striving with all the people at the synagogue that day. But there were only some of those who were preached to, who He worked on with power to bring them to salvation. He brought some to conviction and conversion. The rest were resisting His striving with them. That is the nature of the total depravity of our hearts before we come to know Christ. Some people, as they listen to gospel, are resisting the Holy Spirit as He is working through those believers whom Christ would use to witness to them. And if they will not receive the truth of the word preached to them, they will eventually find themselves always resisting the Holy Spirit, and thus they will perish in their sins. Those of you who would be better witnesses for Christ remember this. When you go about to do the good work of witnessing to Christ and to the truth of His word, realize that, with some, you will get no resistance and with others you will get much. It all depends on what the Holy Spirit is doing in their hearts and whether they are resisting Him. Your witness is never in vain in either case. You are a good witness when you share the truth of what you know, praying for the power of the Holy Spirit to be manifested through your words and actions.

2nd - You will become a better witness for Jesus by remembering where He is presently, and that He is coming back again. (Verses 9-11)

You remember Stephen, one of the first deacons, was a man who was chosen to serve tables there in the early church at Jerusalem. In his witnessing He remembered where Jesus was, when he preached. He was called "a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit," in Acts 6: 5. In Acts 6: 8 and following it says that he was, "full of faith and power, and he did great wonders and signs among the people." Being filled with faith and power is what it means to be filled with the Spirit. Do you speak to others about Christ with faith in exercise in your heart? You will never open your mouth without faith. It says in 2 Corinthians 4: 13 – "I believed, therefore I spoke."

It is faith that pleases God the Holy Spirit so that He will work while you speak and while you do things as a servant of Christ. Faith is the basis of your being a good witness to Christ and the truth of the Scriptures. Turn with me over to Acts 6 verse 9. "Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen, disputing with Stephen." "And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke." Verses 11-14 speak of the false charges that were brought against him by these unbelieving Jews. And when he was called upon to answer the false charges which were brought against him, it says in verse 15, "And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel." When he was asked by them if these charges were true, he answered by preaching a sermon to them. He gave them a history lesson in God's using various of the patriarchs and Moses and Solomon as witnesses to the truth of what God is pleased with. He told them that God was pleased with faith in His word and obedience to His commandments. He was pleased with true worship ascending to Him in the tabernacle and the temple which was being conducted according to His word.

And then he finished His Spirit-anointed sermon in this way. Verse 48 – "But the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands, as the prophet says: 'Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool.'" "What house will you build for Me? says the Lord, or what is the place of My rest?" "Has My hand not made all these things?" "You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears!" "You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you." "Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?" "And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it." "When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth." "But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, "Look!" "I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" "Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; and they cast him out of the city and stoned him." "And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul."

What will make for your becoming a good witness? It will be your being full of the Holy Spirit and power. It will be your being filled with the truth of how God has dealt with His people in the past, and being able to relate these things to others. Are you willing to talk about what is important to God; which is faith in His word, faith in His Son, and what sin will do to even religious people if they keep resist the preaching of the word? But what was most significant to Stephen's witness was that he remembered where Christ was. He was so full of the Spirit that he was able to gaze into heaven and see the glory of God and Christ Himself. He knew that His witness would lead him to death, but it did not matter. This is how he would glorify God. He could continue to witness to the truth all the way to the point of death, even while he was being killed. His witness became even better yet, because it says in verse 60, that he said as he was dying, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." He was even able to forgive his enemies who were killing him. He still wished that they could come to know His Lord; that they would not be punished eternally for what they were doing to him at that very moment. This man was a witness, but he became a better witness, as he went on in his discourse, because he remembered where Jesus was.

Being a good witness is beholding the glory of the Lord Jesus in your mind and heart, and telling others about it. It is also praying for grace that you might be able to tell others around you the truth of their total depravity and their sinnership. And it is believing that even while you are being persecuted or killed for saying these things, that you have still have the grace of Christ to forgive your enemies for what they are doing to you. Dear Christian, do you have that kind of grace yet? Perhaps not yet. But please see where it comes from; even to speak in the smallest of ways for Christ. You are a witness even now, as a Christian. But that witness can grow if you

will remember that Jesus is risen from the dead; that He has also ascended on high. He is seated at the right hand of God the Father. He ever lives to make intercession for you; to be your Advocate in relation to all of your sins. He will be with you in all of your trials. In all of the oppositions of people against you, people who do not want or appreciate your witness to them, “remember Jesus Christ risen from the dead, for which you suffer trouble as an evildoer, even to the point of chains; but the word of God is not chained.” “Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus, and with it, eternal glory.” (2nd Timothy 2: 8 and 9)

Remember also the principle of sowing and reaping. In Ecclesiastes Chapter 11, verse 4 the wise man, the Preacher Solomon says this: “He who observes the wind will not sow, and he who regards the clouds will not reap.” “As you do not know what is the way of the wind, or how the bones grow in the womb of her who is with child, so you do not know the works of God who makes everything.” “In the morning sow your seed, and in the evening do not withhold your hand; for you do not know which will prosper, either this or that, or whether both alike will be good.” Dear Christian; sow the seed of the word while you have opportunity. Do it in the morning, and do it in the evening, and do it any time that you find that you can in some way bear testimony to the truth of what Christ has done. Bear a good witness to who Christ is, and how a person can be saved. Do not fail to let your speech be seasoned with this good salt, that your speech might minister grace to those who will listen to you. In giving your witness now, while you have life and breath, it will lead you also to pray and to think about how you might share the gospel with all kinds of people around you.

Soon this life will ebb away and there will be no longer any time to do the work of this day that is given to you. “The night is coming when no man can work,” Jesus says. When your day is done, there will be nothing more which you will be able to do for Christ; nothing more that will help bring any of your loved ones, or any of your friends, to Christ, by your words. So pray to God to speak to them now, while you have life and breath. Remember that your good deeds for others will speak volumes to them of the love of Christ. Perhaps your works will penetrate their hearts where your words might fail to go. “Whatever your hand find to do, do it with all your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going,” Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 9: 10. Remember Christ risen from the dead; soon coming King. Remember Jesus Christ ascended, having all power and authority in heaven and earth. Remember that this power is exercised toward those who will participate in making disciples of all the nations, teaching them to observe all that He has commanded you and them. He will be with you always until you see Him face to face.

And then 3rd – You will become a better witness for Christ when you remember to pray and to be of one accord with the brethren in your church. (Verses 12-14)

Is it not a beautiful thing which the Apostles and disciples of our Lord did after they saw Jesus go back up to heaven. They obeyed Him by going back into Jerusalem. There they entered the upper room where they had been staying, and it says: “They all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.” It was not all that many people who were there. There were about 120 names listed in the membership of the fledgling Church. But the beautiful thing was, that they were of one accord. They had been commanded to “tarry in Jerusalem until they were endued with power from on high.” And that is just what they did. Sometimes it is hard to wait for the promises of the Father to come to pass, and to become a reality in our lives. But waiting in obedience to the Lord’s word led them to continue steadfastly in prayer and supplication for the answer to their prayers; for the fulfillment of the Lord’s promise to them that the Holy Spirit was coming, and He was going to give them power. He was going to give them power like they had never seen or experienced before as Christians. This was going to be the baptism of the Church. They would

receive gifts and grace that would give them the power to be good witnesses and to see spiritual results too, according to the Lord's great purpose. Peter who had denied his Lord just a month and a half before, would now have the boldness to stand and to preach the gospel to thousands. He would declare that some of his hearers were the very ones responsible for putting the Lord Jesus to death. They would be pricked in their hearts, and they would ask, "What must we do?" And Peter would tell them to "repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." How very great a testimony this was; that a man who had so pitifully failed to be bold before, and who had even denied knowing Jesus, could now boldly declare Him as the only Savior of sinners. And so, because of the Spirit's working, three thousand people believed his message, and were baptized that day. This is the same power which is at work in you who believe, here in this room today. How did all this come about? One of the main reasons that it did, from the human side, was that there was great prayer that preceded it. And, it also says in our text, that the believers there were of one accord. It is the Holy Spirit's work to bring about a true unity in doctrine and purpose.

Let me say this in closing. Our God is a prayer-hearing, prayer-answering God. And the Lord Jesus Christ loves to mediate our prayers to the Father. "Come my soul, thy suit prepare: Jesus loves to answer prayer; He himself has bid thee pray, therefore will not say thee nay; therefore will not say thee nay." "Thou are coming to a King, large petitions with you bring; for His grace and power are such, none can ever ask too much; none can ever ask too much." If this is the case, then will you not covenant with me to begin to ask for the Lord to come and do great things for us. Ask Him to bring us visitors. Ask Him to give us conversions to Christ and additions to the church. Ask Him that we might be fervent in spirit, and really serving the Lord. Ask Him to enable us to be of one accord about what we would like to see Him do in this church for His glory, and for our good and our encouragement. Ask Him to make us joyful in His presence in our times of worship. We do not need another baptism of the Spirit. We already have the Spirit. We need to be filled with the Spirit. We need more of the Spirit's presence and power and working in our heart and life as a church. Luke Chapter 11, verse 13 says, "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him." O, will you not pray with me and ask our dear heavenly Father to give us more of the Holy Spirit; that His cause and kingdom might flourish in our hearts, and in our midst?