

We come this week to our final sermon in a short topical series entitled, The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit. Thus far we've considered His work in creation and common grace, His work upon Christ, His work upon individual believers, and last week, His work within the collective church.

If you recall, I suggested last week that the Spirit works within the church by Uniting, Gifting, and Enabling us to Worship. It's the task of the Holy Spirit to unite us in Christ, the truth, and love, equip us with spiritual gifts for the edification of the body, and enable us to worship in truth, faith, and love.

This week I want to consider another way in which the Holy Spirit works in the church and that is – He empowers us to witness for Christ in the world. In other words, the Spirit works in the church to enable us to witness for Christ outside the church.

Acts 1:8 is a promise of Christ to His apostles. He was about to return to heaven and then He would send the Holy Spirit. According to this promise, the Spirit would empower them to bear witness for Christ throughout the entire world.

Thus, I want to come this morning to our theme: The work of the Spirit through the church in the world, and we will consider Acts 1:8 under three main headings: The Nature of the Promise, The Scope of the Promise, and The Lessons from the Promise.

- I. The Nature of the Promise
- II. The Scope of the Promise
- III. Lessons from the Promise

I. The Nature of the Promise

1. The heart of our Savior's promise is power—"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you."
2. (1) The source of power—the source of this power is the Holy Spirit—"you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you."
3. This of course refers to the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost—the Spirit would empower them to bear witness.
4. The gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was a once for all historical act, similar to the crucifixion of our Savior.
5. This doesn't deny that Christians had the Spirit before Pentecost, any more than it denies Christians were saved by virtue of Christ's death before it happened.
6. But, as we consider the relevant passages, especially in John 14-17, the Spirit was given at Pentecost in two unique ways.
7. (a) The Spirit gave a fuller revelation—the Holy Spirit would now reveal the things of Christ with greater clarity.
8. (b) The Spirit was given to all kinds of men—before Pentecost there were relatively few non-Jews who were saved.
9. But the promise of Pentecost was—"I will pour My Spirit upon all flesh"—that is, upon all kinds or tribes of men.
10. And thus, from these two facts we learn, the Holy Spirit was given to empower the church to take the gospel to the world.
11. This was, in many ways, the unique purpose of Pentecost—to enable the church to witness for Christ in the world.
12. (2) The purpose of power—"and you shall be witnesses to Me"—that is, they would testify of Christ to the world.
13. This is what the Spirit empowered them to do—to testify or bear witness of Christ—that is, to preach the gospel.

14. Now, before I go any further let me here make a necessary clarification—the apostles uniquely bore witness of Christ.
15. This is what's referred to as "apostolic witness"—they were eye-witnesses of Christ's life, death, and resurrection.
16. And while there are no longer apostles in the church today, all Christians in some sense, are witnesses for Christ.
17. We must still bear witness to who Christ is and what Christ has done, all as revealed within the Holy Scriptures.
18. This is the great work of the Holy Spirit—to enable the church to be an effective witness for Christ in the world.

II. The Scope of the Promise

1. Acts 1:8—"And you shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."
2. Notice our Savior starts with Jerusalem, widens to include Judea and Samaria, and then includes the ends of the earth.
3. The point being—the promise of the Holy Spirit was not only intended for the apostles, but for the entire church.
4. Put another way—our Savior gave the Holy Spirit not only for the apostles, but for every generation that follows.
5. Matt.28:19—"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations" v20—"and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."
6. That is, while the initial commission was given to the apostles, our Savior extends the commission to every generation.
7. He promises to be with every generation, just as He was with the apostles, empowering them by the Holy Spirit.
8. Thus, while Acts 1:8 contains a unique promise for the apostles, it has an ongoing application for the church throughout every generation.
9. Christ gave His Spirit to His church to enable them to bear witness of Him, throughout every generation, to the four corners of the world.
10. This is a great promise indeed! Christ, by His Spirit, is with His beloved people, bearing witness of Himself, through His church.

III. Lessons from the Promise

1. Here I want to suggest three important lessons, largely taken from our Savior's promise to His church in Acts 1:8.
2. (1) The Church is a witness of Christ in the world—this is a very important lesson that needs constant stressing.
3. The church is not merely expected to gather weekly to worship God, but we are also a witness for God in the world.
4. Perhaps I can put it like this—the church must look in three directions—up (that's worship), within (that's edification), and without (that's evangelism).
5. And brethren, I fear it's rather easy to focus on the first two (looking up and within), at the neglect of the third (looking without).
6. We all are very busy with work and our families, that we can overlook this important aspect of the church's work.
7. But the church is to bear witness of Christ in the world—she is to testify of His Person and work to the world.
8. Now let me remind you that the church bears witness of Christ both by their works (what they do) and their words (what they say).

9. And both of these have their place—our works (the way we live) ought to make a way for our words (what we say).
10. Matt.5:14-16—"You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."
11. But here by bearing witness of Christ I am largely limiting our focus not to our works but words—speaking to others about Christ.
12. Brethren, no sinner was ever saved apart from the testimony of Scripture concerning the Person and work of Christ.
13. Perhaps I can put it like this—by bearing witness of Christ I am referring to what's often called "evangelism."
14. Evangelism is merely the sharing of the evangel (the gospel) with others—it's bearing witness of Christ and His work.
15. Now, I want to suggest when it comes to evangelism, there are two basic ways the church bears witness for Christ.
16. (a) Collective evangelism—by this I mean evangelism that is organized and purposed by the church as a whole.
17. For example, preaching at rescue missions, going door to door, open-air preaching, and neighborhood outreaches.
18. These are all outreach efforts wherein the church collectively and formally seeks to witness for Christ in the world.
19. (b) Individual evangelism—by this I mean, individual evangelism by the members of the church, in their own areas of influence.
20. Extended family members, school-mates, neighbors, co-workers, and different people we meet in our communities.
21. This means brethren, that every member of the church has the responsibility of witnessing for Christ in the world.
22. And, the best places for witnessing is within your own areas of influence—those places you frequent most often.
23. Each of us have a little world in which we live—places we regularly go and people we regularly or often meet.
24. Thus, the church (both collectively and individually), must bear witness for Christ within a dark and lost world.
25. (2) The Church is a powerful witness of Christ in the world—that is, the church is empowered by the Holy Spirit.
26. Perhaps I can put it like this—it's the Holy Spirit who enables us to serve as witnesses for Christ in this world.
27. All true, sincere, and effective witness of Christ in this world, is the result of the Holy Spirit within our hearts.
28. Thus, I want to suggest four ways in which the Holy Spirit empowers the church to witness for Christ in the world.
29. (a) He gives us a burden to speak to the lost—by this I mean, the Spirit fills our hearts with compassion for the lost.
30. I fear brethren, this is one reason we often fail to speak for Christ to others—we are not burdened for their salvation.
31. O what a tragedy! That we can walk through this world with little of any heart-felt concern for those around us!
32. Dear friends, I assure you, this is very unlike our Savior, who often felt in His human soul the burden of lost souls.
33. Mk.6:34—"And Jesus, when He came out, saw a great multitude and was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd. So He began to teach them many things."
34. Notice, our Savior was moved with compassion because they were lost sheep—they were not Christian people.

35. And because of that, our Savior loving and sinless soul was moved with compassion—He felt mercy for them.
36. And notice what He did as a result—"So He began to teach them many things"—He taught them the truth of God.
37. O brethren, what need we have to plead that God would, by the Holy Spirit, gives us this Christ-like compassion!
38. That we would look upon the lost around us as sheep without a shepherd, slaves of sin and Satan, and under the just wrath of God!
39. Yes, a holy indignation is also proper, but if you remember, our Savior mostly reserved that for the religious hypocrites, whereas He showed great patience and compassion to sinners and tax-collectors.
40. This is where all true evangelism begins, by the Spirit giving us a burden for sinners who are around us every day.
41. And thus, dear brethren, let us ask God that His Spirit would burden us with a sense of urgency in sharing the gospel.
42. It's a sure sign that we lack the filling of the Holy Spirit, if we can walk on this earth with no concern for others!
43. Dear Christian, one of the fundamental reasons who've been redeemed, is to bear witness of Christ to the world.
44. (b) He gives us opportunity to speak to the lost—by this I mean, the Spirit provides occasions for us to share the gospel.
45. This is again seen throughout the book of Acts, wherein the Holy Spirit supernaturally opens doors for evangelism.
46. Though there are unique aspects of the Spirit's work in the book of Acts, but the basic principle remains for all Christians.
47. It's the work of the Holy Spirit to open up doors, to give us opportunity, to speak the gospel to poor and lost sinners.
48. Brethren, we must remember, only the Holy Spirit can prepare people to properly and believingly receive the gospel.
49. And it's only the Holy Spirit who providentially opens doors that Christians can bear witness of Christ to others.
50. Col.4:3—"Meanwhile pray for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ."
51. O brethren, how often do we pray that God the Holy Spirit would open up doors for us to share the gospel of God?
52. This means we must add to our daily prayers, prayers that God's Spirit would providentially give us opportunity.
53. And not only this, but we must anticipate throughout the day, that God would, for Christ's sake, answer these prayers.
54. Brethren I assure you few things would give us confidence to bear witness of Christ than thinking in this way.
55. You've gotten to know the young lady that works at the gas-station, and then one day a door is left wide open.
56. She says something like this to you—"Things have become so chaotic in this world! What can we possible do?"
57. What a providentially opportunity to say to her—"Young lady the only way I make it is by faith in God and His word!"
58. Or else, the plumber comes over to fix your hot water heater, and says to you—I notice you homeschool. Why?
59. And you say to him—Because we are Christians, and we believe we must teach our children truth and not lies (and then you can ask – Are you a Christian?).
60. Friends, I have to confess, I have failed to improve upon many such occasions in the 24 years I've been a Christian!

61. Many times, I have returned to my car, or said goodbye to the plumber, only to feel a sense of remorse in my soul.
62. And what do you think is likely the cause of that remorse, but the Holy Spirit within me, gently correcting me.
63. (c) He gives us boldness to speak to the lost—by this I mean, the Spirit enables us to fear God more than man.
64. And this is another reason why many Christians fail to witness for Christ—we are afraid of what they may say.
65. In short, it's very easy to fear man more than God—to be afraid of what man says and how we will be thought of.
66. Will they laugh at me—will they get mad at me—will they yell at me—or even worse, will they physically harm me?
67. Brethren, to be honest, these are thoughts and fears that I personally have felt or thought on more than one occasion.
68. But it's the Holy Spirit, who emboldens us and enables us to fear God more than we fear the faces of mere men.
69. This again can be illustrated throughout the book of Acts—how did the apostles preach the word while facing so much opposition.
70. There was the rejection of the Jews and the imprisonment of the Romans—and yet they boldly preached Christ.
71. Acts 4:31—"And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness."
72. O brethren, what power we have access to in the person and ministry of the Spirit—He gives us power to speak.
73. Only the Holy Spirit can override our native weakness and fearfulness—only the Spirit can make us bold as lions.
74. (d) He gives us wisdom to speak to the lost—by this I mean, the Spirit gives us the very words to speak to others.
75. And again brethren, this is another reason we often fail to witness for Christ—we feel our inability to engage with opposing views.
76. If we were honest, this is why we often fail to speak up—What if they ask me a question I'm not able to answer?
77. What if the person has legitimate questions or well-thought-out responses—how will I be able to answer them?
78. Well, brethren again, this is where the Holy Spirit comes to our aid, and reminds us of the Holy Scriptures and gives us wisdom to answer.
79. Lk.12:11-12—"Now when they bring you to the synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry about how or what you should answer, or what you should say. For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say (Jn.14:26)."
80. Now for starters brethren, I fully admit that this promise has a unique application to the original apostles of Christ.
81. Furthermore, I also must clarify, such a promise does not alleviate our need to memorize and understand Scripture.
82. We all must learn to anticipate the common objections and responses we will likely receive from blind sinners.
83. But, we must also believe that the Holy Spirit will assist us as we seek to share with poor sinners the truth of God.
84. Let us not look to our clever responses to win arguments, but remember, the power comes from the Spirit blessing His word.
85. How many times have I spoken to people about religious things, only to first ask the Holy Spirit to give me wisdom.
86. Brethren, this is true regardless who I speak to—Christians or none—O God, I need wisdom to bear witness of You!

87. And this is why dear brethren, before we say a word we must utter a very short and silent prayer—O Spirit, help me!
88. (3) The Church is guaranteed success as a witness of Christ in the world—by this I mean, ultimately speaking, it's the Spirit work to make His word effectual.
89. The Holy Spirit not only burdens us, emboldens us, and enables us to speak the word to others, but He powerfully applies that word.
90. In other words—while we have a reasonability to speak the word of God to others, only the Spirit can save sinners.
91. And here's my point—we have the promise of Holy Scripture, that the Spirit will apply the word to elect sinners.
92. Acts 1:8—"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."
93. This is a certain promise—Christ will build His church—He will empower His people to testify of Him throughout all generations!
94. O dear brethren, what a tremendous encouragement this is for poor and fearful Christians—ultimately speaking it's not up to my compassion, boldness, or clever arguments.
95. Ultimately and finally speaking it's up to the Holy Spirit of God to apply God's word to poor and blind sinners.
96. The Holy Spirit will of a certainty bless the word to those the Father has chosen and He will bring them home.
97. Do you remember that little phrase in the Apostle's Creed—"I believe in the Holy Spirit"—I believe He will give me power!
98. This is how and why we must bear witness of Christ, believing in the Holy Spirit and in His powerful ministry within us!