

WHAT JESUS SAID TO YOU AND ME**ACTS 1:1-11**

I invite you to use your imagination this morning. Imagine you are fully aware right now that you will die at midnight tonight. What would you do for the rest of the day? Who would you talk to and what would you say to them? If I knew I was going to die in about 12 hours, here is what I think I would do. First, I'd meet with my wife and get my kids and grandkids on the phone for a conversation. Sure, I'd discuss with them my funeral wishes and review my financial arrangements. But I'd spend more time letting them know how much I love them and how important it is that each of them know and follow Jesus with deep commitment and great passion. I'd do my best to speak into their lives words of encouragement and blessing – my hopes and dreams for them, my perceptions of their strengths and weaknesses.

Second, I'd have a meeting with anyone and everyone who's a part of this church to share with them what I think our church needs to do to become more effective for Jesus. I'd thank you for the privilege of being their pastor. Third, I might call a few people and ask their forgiveness for my part in the fact that our personal relationship isn't what it should have been. Fourth, I'd also try and have a conversation with several people who aren't followers of Jesus. I'd say something like this to them. "Look, I'm going to be dead in a few hours. Even at the risk of offending you, I want to talk to you about something that's a matter of life and death. Can I share with you what Jesus has done for me and what He wants to do for you?" Finally, I think I'd just spend some time worshiping and praising God, asking Him to forgive me of any unconfessed sins, and asking for His strength and grace to face the great fact of my death with courage.

If you knew you would be dead at midnight tonight, what would you do with the rest of this day? Don't you think it would be spent pursuing things of ultimate importance, of highest priority, and of greatest value? Now, in a sense, Jesus was in that situation the day He ascended back to Heaven. Today is a final message on the real last words of Jesus. Not His statements on the day He died on the cross. Instead, we've looked at several statements Jesus made to individuals and groups over a forty day period of time following His resurrection. Today we want to read and think about what Jesus said on His very last day before going back to Heaven. Granted, He wasn't dying... again! Nevertheless, I believe - at that profound moment - Jesus only wanted to talk about what was and is of ultimate importance, of highest priority, and of greatest value. Let's read right now what it was Jesus said on His very last day.

Those first followers of Jesus had been in the city of Jerusalem now for about six weeks. It's wasn't home. So the obvious question for many of them was, "What happens now? Jesus rose from the dead – fantastic! But what are we supposed to do now? Should we go back home and start fishing or collecting taxes again?" What we just read makes it clear they still didn't get it yet. They still thought Jesus was going to throw out the Romans and make Israel a world power. But Jesus had a very different and a far greater agenda than that. His words are just as important for us today.

Because Jesus is alive, what does that mean for your life and mine? Jesus' final words before He returned to Heaven might best be captured in two thoughts. First...

WE ARE EMPOWERED FOR GOD'S PURPOSE.

Jesus spoke a great deal about the Holy Spirit on this very last day. He told His followers they needed to hang out there in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit was sent to them. When that happened, the Holy Spirit would give them spiritual power they never had before. Jesus promised to send those first Christians the presence and power of God Himself in and through the Holy Spirit in a way human beings had never experienced before. Jesus had spoken about all this even before His death on the cross. He said, "But it is actually best for you that I go away, because if I don't, the Counselor won't come. If I do go away, he will come because I will send him to you." (Jo. 16:7 NLT) It's hard to understand how Jesus' going away would somehow be better for any of us, isn't it? When Jesus walked the Earth physically, however, the presence and power of God was – in some sense – localized and limited to Jesus. But after He rose again and ascended back to Heaven, the Holy Spirit came upon those first followers of Jesus in a unique and wonderful way. They were able to say and do things they'd been unable to say and do before precisely because the Holy Spirit now lived within them. And that same spiritual reality is just as available to you and me!

What is God's power? It's isn't physical or mental power, although His power can certainly affect your body and mind. It's spiritual power. It's the God-given ability to achieve spiritual results. It's God getting Himself in on the inside of you to help you do what you could never do on your own. Now right here is the essential difference between the Christian faith and all those self-help, self-motivation schemes. So much is said today about awaking the giant within you, discovering your own potential, or the power of thinking positively about yourself in terms of solving life's problems and challenges. True, those techniques have some limited psychological value, but they ultimately disappoint. Why? Because I don't need more of Rick Breusch; I need more of God in Rick Breusch! When Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as the Comforter or Counselor, the Greek word was "paraclete." That was a term for a warrior in ancient times. Greek soldiers went into battle in pairs. When the enemy attacked, they would stand back to back. They covered each other's blind side. Your battle partner was your paraclete. Jesus doesn't ask you to face life's battles alone. The Holy Spirit is your battle partner. He always covers your blind side and always fights for your well-being.

Do you remember when those moving sidewalks first showed up at various airports? You'd be rushing to catch a plane sweating and puffing. Then, you'd look over and see someone walking half as fast as you were, but going faster. He was accessing that new moving sidewalk! When we walk through life in the Spirit, He comes underneath us and carries us along. Yes, we still have to walk, but we walk relying on Him to move us along with greater effectiveness and less personal energy.

Jesus spoke here about the Holy Spirit “coming upon” those disciples. What does that mean? Someone stronger influences someone weaker leaving the weaker person changed in some way. Think of a stronger wrestler exerting the pressure of his superior strength on a weaker wrestler. Or, think of a teacher using the power of her superior education to mold the minds of her students. The Holy Spirit continually does His work in you by coming upon you. That’s direct and constant contact with your inner spirit.

Here’s at least four ways God’s power can show up in your life and mine. First, your mind gets sharper. You’ll begin to discern what is true spiritually and what is false spiritually much more effectively. The Bible says the Spirit of truth now lives in you. When someone says something about God, or about what’s important in life, or what they think is true, you’ll find a Voice speaking into your mind, “Yes, that’s right” or “Be careful. That’s not true.” Second, your heart gets bigger. You’ll discover a new compassion for people – especially hurting people – you never had before. You begin to care deeply about people who don’t know Jesus as Savior yet. Third, your character gets better. The Holy Spirit never sets up residence in your life so you can stay the same. He’s about changing your attitudes, your actions, your lifestyle choices, and your values so they resemble and reflect Jesus more and more. Fourth, your purpose gets clearer. My friend, you have a greater purpose in life than just to punch in your 80 or 90 years and then punch out. You have a far greater purpose than to get a great education, secure a well-paying job, raise a family, and then enjoy a comfortable retirement. God offers you and me His power for a purpose. More about that later!

When does a person receive the Holy Spirit? Only when you place your trust in Jesus. It happens when, by faith, you say, “God, I’m a sinner. Please forgive me. I now believe Jesus paid the penalty for my sins and I ask Him to be my Savior. And, I also want Him to be my Lord – my 24 hour, 365 days a year – Boss.” Christians sometimes call it being born again or being regenerated. It’s what Jesus meant when he said in the passage we read, “John baptized with water, but in just a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 1:5 NLT) John the Baptist baptized people – he covered, surrounded, and inundated them in water – as a way to symbolize being cleansed from their sins. But Jesus baptizes people – He covers, surrounds, and inundates them with the Holy Spirit – when they receive Him as Savior and Lord. This was Jesus’ promise not just to His first followers, but also to you and me. Because the Holy Spirit now lives within us, God can be present and powerful in and through the lives of all of Jesus’ followers – millions and millions of people all over the world.

Do you get that? It’s really hard to grasp that God’s power is given to just ordinary, flawed people like you and me. Even as a Christian, you may have trouble recognizing the power of the Holy Spirit in your life. You can know something exists, but be ignorant of how to use or access it. For example, nuclear power wasn’t created back in the 1940s when the first atomic bomb was developed. Nuclear power has been around since the creation of the universe, but it took a very long time for human beings to discover, access, and use that power. You can be a Jesus follower and still be just

painfully ignorant of the power of the Holy Spirit. God wants you to discover and put to use the power of His Spirit within you this day and every day.

Jesus' resurrection demonstrated God's power. Jesus' ascension demonstrated God's power. And sending the Holy Spirit into your life and mine demonstrates God's power. All too many of us who believe in Jesus and possess the Holy Spirit live lives that are essentially hopeless, helpless, and powerless. God invites us to share in His victory. With the Holy Spirit living inside of you, you can break the power of life's hurts and hang-ups. With the Holy Spirit living inside of you, you can resist temptation. With the Holy Spirit living inside of you, you can die to your own inadequacy and discover Jesus' sufficiency. With the Holy Spirit living inside of you, you can even turn today's failures into tomorrow's spiritual victories. With the Holy Spirit living inside of you, you can say with the great Christian leader, Paul, when he said, "For I can do everything with the help of Christ who give me the strength I need." (Ph. 4:13 NLT) Is it any wonder, then, that on this very last day, Jesus wanted to talk about the power of the Holy Spirit? He made it possible for you and me to live life on a completely different level than before. But God doesn't just offer us His power automatically or for no reason. We are empowered by His Spirit for a purpose. And that brings us to a second great thought...

WE ARE EMPLOYED IN GOD'S PLAN.

C.S. Lewis made this interesting statement, "I didn't go to religion to make me happy. I always knew a bottle of Port would do that. If you want a religion to make you feel really comfortable, I certainly don't recommend Christianity." If you make happiness the goal of your life, you'll never find it. Happiness is a byproduct of something else. The Bible makes it clear that true, lasting happiness is a direct byproduct of finding God's purpose for your life and then getting busy being involved in His plan. Jesus spoke about that plan on His very last day. This is what mattered most to Jesus. This was most important, of greatest value, and of highest priority. No, it wasn't about getting the Romans out of Israel or returning the nation of Israel to prominence. Instead it was about taking the good news of who Jesus is and what He's done to every corner of the planet. Jesus said, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you." (Acts 1:8 NLT) Why? To do what? For what purpose? But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you to live a happy and comfortable life? No. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you so you can enjoy a problem free life in every way? No. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you so you can live to and for yourself? No. Hear again what Jesus said on His very last day. "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8 NLT)

Did you get that? Christian, your primary role in life is not to be a pastor, a teacher, a salesman, a businesswoman, a secretary, a doctor, a nurse, an engineer, an analyst, or even a spouse or a parent. Your primary role in life is to be a witness. Because God made the Holy Spirit available to you, your primary role is to be a witness. What does it

mean to be a witness? A witness is someone who knows a fact is true personally. Many of those first Christians were eyewitnesses of the risen Jesus. Your faith and mine is built on their eyewitness accounts. True, they were witnesses to Jesus in a unique way that can't be repeated. Nevertheless, you're called to be a witness to and about Jesus as well. How do you know the good news about Jesus is true? Because you've experienced God's love yourself, God's grace yourself, God's forgiveness yourself, and God's power yourself. It's personal.

Timothy Johnson, a pastor, was reminded of this great truth at the airport one day. Like everyone else, he went through security screening. Every inch of his carry-on bag got searched carefully. The screener politely asked Timothy to step back while he poked around, unloaded stuff, unzipped pockets, and felt the linings of the bag. Timothy happened to notice the ring on his right hand – a silver ring with a cross on it. Timothy mentioned the ring. As he continued to search Timothy's bag, the screener said, "Yeah, the ring. It means I'm a follower of Jesus. You know, in my job one of the things we worry about is dynamite. Do you know where that word comes from? It's from the Greek word "dunamis" which means power. As a Christian, I know all of the power belongs to God. That's why He sent Jesus. So while I'm doing my job, I know He's doing His job. I put all my trust in Him. All power belongs to Him, and He's here with us. Well, Mr. Johnson, have a great trip." Then, the screener moved on to the next person. Timothy smiled in appreciation as he walked away. It wasn't the place for an extended spiritual conversation. But in less than 30 seconds, that screener had provided a powerful witness to a total stranger – calmly, confidently, and without hesitation. He knew his primary role in life wasn't being a security screener. No, instead he knew he was called to be a witness to the life changing power of Jesus.

A witness is a person whose walk in life matches up with his or her talk. Non-Christians often say the biggest reason they aren't convinced to become Christians is the hypocrisy of Christians. Some of them expect perfection which is silly, true enough. But others just want to see some authenticity in you and me. If you make a mistake, just admit it, apologize, or ask for forgiveness. Then get up and show them the power of God's forgiveness and grace in your life. I believe that's a stronger witness to non-Christians than pretending to live a perfect life. A witness is willing to die for his or her faith. The original Greek word for witness in the Bible is "martur" from which we get the word "martyr." Many of those first followers of Jesus became actual martyrs for their faith in Jesus. True, you and I are not likely to put our lives on the line in this country by living for Jesus, but there are many places around the world where that's a very real threat. Regardless, I've always been challenged by this question: If I was brought up on charges of being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict me?

On His very last day, it's as if Jesus said, "Look, if you're My follower, this is what's all important to Me. Get the message out there. Help ordinary, everyday people you live with, work with, and live next door to understand God loves them. Let them know what I did for them at the cross and the empty tomb. If you're not interested in being My witness, the power of the Holy Spirit is being wasted on you. But if you make My

highest priority your highest priority, I will pump a kind of spiritual power into your life that comes directly from and through God the Holy Spirit.” Jesus told those first Christians to start being witnesses right where they were at. Right there in Jerusalem. That’s also where you and I are called to witnesses first. Right where we are today. Right where we live. Right where we are at. But Jesus also had a vision as big as the planet. And, so, you and I also need to develop a worldwide, global understanding of and involvement in bringing men, women, boys, and girls from every nation on the planet into a personal relationship with Jesus.

God didn’t complete His plan 2,000 years ago. He just started it. His plan is to bring men, women, boys, and girls into an eternal relationship with Himself until Jesus returns. You’re part of His plan. He found you, forgave you, changed your life, and altered your eternity forever. His plan continues through you and me to others. You are now employed in His plan. Are you praying for anyone specifically today who doesn’t know Jesus personally yet? Are you looking for opportunities to build an authentic friendship with someone who needs Jesus today? Are you willing to wave a “faith flag”? A faith flag is just a way of letting another person know you’re a follower of Jesus – like the story of the security screener’s ring at the airport. Are you praying for the opportunity to have a spiritual conversation with someone who needs to know how much God loves and values him or her? Do you make of highest priority in your life - this day and every day - what Jesus made of highest priority on His very last day?

A man by the name of Russell Brownsworth tells about a time when he was in seminary. He and his family lived in a mobile home park while he was in school. His two older children (aged 7 and 9) enjoyed playing with a bunch of other kids in the mobile home park roughly about the same age. Russell’s youngest child, Carrie, wasn’t quite three years old at the time. In the minds of his two older kids, Carrie was always in the way. Ten minutes into one of the neighborhood games – hide and seek, for example – Carrie would get pushed aside or skin her knee. One afternoon, she came through the front door crying for Mommy’s comfort predictably once again. She had gotten hurt somehow. Russell’s wife, Elizabeth, attempted to comfort her by giving her two freshly baked cookies. “Now, don’t tell the big kids yet,” Mommy cautioned. “I haven’t finished making the cookies. I haven’t got enough for everybody yet.” Nevertheless, it took Carrie less than three seconds to make it to the screen door, fling it wide open, and announce to the bigger kids, “Cookies! I gots cookies!” You see, great news should be shared with great enthusiasm, right?! You and I have far better news than little Carrie. “Jesus, we gots Jesus! We gots the risen Lord – the King of kings and the Master of the universe!”

You and I are empowered for God’s purpose. You and I are employed in God’s plan. Great news needs to be shared this day, any day, and every day!