Session 11

There are two kinds of witnesses. The first is someone who sees something happen. The second is someone who has had something happen to them. Both are important. But the first kind changes your perspective; the second kind changes your identity.

There’s a difference between watching others follow Jesus and following Him daily ourselves. The former is witnessing something. The latter has become a witness of Someone.

What is the difference between witnessing something and becoming a witness?

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What is a remarkable sight that changed your perspective?

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What is a significant event that changed who you are?

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In this session, we will take a look at the risen Jesus’ words when He met His disciples on Easter evening. He told them they were His witnesses. He showed how the Old Testament witnessed to His past work as Messiah and His people’s future work on mission. Then Jesus commissioned His people to be witnesses to the whole world through the power of His Spirit.

1. The Bible witnesses to Jesus the Messiah (Luke 24:44-45).

   44 Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” 45 Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,

Proclaiming Jesus is not just one aspect of the Bible; it’s the primary purpose of this divinely inspired Word. The first witness we see in this passage is God Himself, revealing His character through human authors in order to prepare the way for Jesus and then proclaim Him as the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). Jesus claimed that the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms spoke of Him. Then He opened the minds of His disciples to understand the Old Testament.

From beginning to end, the Bible teaches that God loves the people He has created. His love motivated Him to become “God with us” even though we had chosen to become “us without God.” The God from whom we desperately need salvation made His residence among us (John 1:14), just as the Old Testament had foretold and foreshadowed.

Like the first-century disciples, we need Christ to open our minds in order to understand the Scriptures. We need His Spirit to help us see how God’s Word serves as a witness to Jesus.

Knowing we need the Lord to open our eyes to understand His Word, how can we become better Bible interpreters?
**Where would you turn in the Old Testament to show how the Bible witnesses to Christ?**

**Law**

Numbers 21:8-9 (John 3:14-15)  
[See also Gen. 3:15; 22:2,13; Ex. 12:13-15; Lev. 16:15-16,30; Deut. 21:22-23; 27:26]

**Prophets**

Isaiah 53:4-6 (1 Peter 2:24-25)  
[See also Isa. 50:5-7; Jonah 1:17; Zech. 12:10]

**Psalms**

Psalm 16:10 (Acts 2:25-32)  
[See also Ps. 22:1,16; 40:6-8; 110:1; Dan. 7:13-14]

Why did Jesus feel it was important to focus the disciples’ attention on how the Law pointed to Him? Perhaps it was because they relied on the Law to understand their relationship with God and their purpose in life. Jesus wanted His followers to understand that His teaching revealed God’s intent from the very beginning. He wasn’t creating a new “religion”; He was clarifying and completing God’s plan for His people.

This truth is significant for us still today. Christians often declare themselves to be “people of the Book,” but to be so, we cannot be satisfied merely with emphasizing the laws or the moral code we find in the Bible. Rather, we must embody the grace and truth of Jesus, the Savior who came to give us a new identity as beloved sons and daughters in the family of God. All the Bible witnesses to the Messiah, and it is the Messiah’s love that changes our identity and our understanding of life and purpose.

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**Voices from Church History**

“Cut the Bible anywhere and it will bleed. The blood of Jesus stains every page.”

—Adrian Rogers (1931-2005)
How should what Jesus said about the Old Testament affect both our interpretation of it as well as our attention to it?

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What role does understanding the big picture of what God has always been up to have in our understanding the Bible?

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46 and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, 47 and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

The Bible witnesses to Jesus the Messiah and to the church’s mission. Why do these two truths go together? Because the disciples’ mission is part of God’s overarching mission that has existed since before the foundation of the earth (Eph. 1:3-14). Jesus wanted the disciples to recognize that the mission the Father sent Him on would continue through the sending of His followers (John 17:18; 20:21).

Now let’s take a moment to consider the proclamation at the heart of the church’s mission. Jesus sums up the “gospel”—the “good news” we are to proclaim—in verse 47: “repentance and forgiveness of sins.” Two aspects of the gospel come into focus here: repentance and forgiveness. Let’s start with the meaning of “repentance.”

If someone asked you what “repentance” means, what would you say?

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Why is it important that we call people to repentance as we share the gospel?

The word *repent* means “to turn around” or “change directions.” The reason repentance is needed (and called for) is because Adam and Eve, in the garden of Eden, made a choice to live apart from the love and goodness of God. In their rebellion, they sinned. Then they ran and hid from the God who made them. But God came to find His wayward creatures, and though He knew where Adam was hiding, still He asked, “Where are you?”

Where are you? Repentance is a heartfelt response to the kindness of a God who grieves the lostness of His people and aches for us to be rescued, to be with Him once again, giving Him praise and honor forever. Sin and selfishness lead us to hide from God in the dark. But the God of the gospel asks, “Where are you?” (Gen. 3:9). Repentance is about turning around and coming into the light.

To call people to repentance is not to say, “Change your life,” but to invite people to run to the God who changes us. It means we plead with people. When the church proclaims repentance, it should be with tears and pleas reflecting the heart of a loving God.

Now let’s turn to the other element of our proclamation—“forgiveness of sins.”

If someone asked you what “forgiveness of sins” means, what would you say?

How do we talk to people about forgiveness of sins if they do not see themselves as sinners?
The church proclaims the gospel—the only message that can bring forgiveness of sins. It is true that many people today have a hard time seeing themselves as sinners in need of salvation. But may I suggest that too many Christians also have a hard time recognizing their sinfulness? Perhaps before we speak honestly to our neighbors about their sin, we should be up front and honest about our own. The message of forgiveness is not delivered by sinless, perfect people; “forgiveness of sins” is proclaimed in Jesus’ name by forgiven sinners.

One of the best ways to proclaim the truth of God’s forgiveness is to confess your own sinfulness, to model the reality of forgiveness with God’s people. The Bible witnesses to the church’s mission by giving us the message of repentance and forgiveness of sins, and then the Spirit empowers us to live as repentant, forgiven sinners. When the church lives as a people in need of a Savior, many in our world will be more open to the Savior.

When was the last time you repented openly about something you’ve done wrong? What were the circumstances?

3. We are Christ’s witnesses to the world (Luke 24:48-49).

48 You are witnesses of these things. 49 And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”

As God’s people, we are Christ’s witnesses to the world. The where of our mission is “everywhere,” but the mission began in Jerusalem. The mission began where the disciples were, and then it spread to the ends of the earth.

To apply this today, think of the nations and start at home. The mission of the church is global, but it starts in “Jerusalem.” Why? (1) Because there are people running from God and hiding in their loneliness and selfishness right here in our neighborhoods and communities. And (2) because we need to learn how to respond to and communicate and embody the gospel right where we are before we can expect to be effective in proclaiming the gospel elsewhere.
Is your church more passionate about local missions or global missions? Why?

How can you increase passion for both elements of our mission? Why is this important?

Witnessing is not just something you do. “Witness” is who you are. Christ has declared that we are His witnesses. It is an identity, not just an activity.

“You are witnesses…” Of what? “These things” refers to all that Christ has accomplished. The disciples were eyewitnesses of Jesus’ suffering and resurrection. We may not have seen Jesus crucified and raised with our physical eyes, but we are witnesses to this God who has saved us.

How can we live up to such an identity? Not through our own power but through His Spirit. Jesus’ first instructions to His disciples were not to go to the nations but to go and wait. They needed the Spirit before they could accomplish this task. The same is true of us. The God we proclaim as Immanuel—God with us—must truly be with us as we share and show His love. The way He draws near and empowers us is through His Spirit.

Why is it significant that Jesus gives us the identity of “witness,” not just the task of “witnessing”? 
Conclusion

To be a witness does not mean you are just trying to get people to change religions, alter philosophical concepts, or adhere to Christian morality. To be a witness means you are representing the truth of Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection and lordship. It means your identity is defined by the love of God shown most clearly in the cross of Jesus Christ. You are a witness of Someone, not just something.

May we be compelled daily to speak and show who Jesus is, to live according to our identity as His witnesses, so that the world will come to know their God-intended, cross-driven, Jesus-fulfilled, Spirit-empowered identity. We are loved by, listening to, and living with Jesus. We are His witnesses.

Voices from the Church

“Mission is both the announcement and the demonstration of the reign of God through Christ.”

–Michael Frost

HIS MISSION, YOUR MISSION

Live on Mission

1. What role does your own experience of forgiveness play in your sharing the gospel with others?
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_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

2. In what ways can we be “witnesses” in our different spheres of life? At home? At work? At school?
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SESSION 1


SESSION 2
1. John Hamnett, Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005), 44, 44.


SESSION 3
1. G. K. Beale, We Become What We Worship (Downers Grove: IVP, 2008), 22.


SESSION 4


SESSION 5

2. David Nasser, A Call to Die (Redemptive Art, 2000), 125.

3. Jim Elliot, quoted in Good to Great in God’s Eyes, by Chip Ingram (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 22.


SESSION 6


SESSION 7
1. Adapted from Kingdom Man, by Tony Evans (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2012), 8-9.


3. Faith Baptist Church, Youngsville, North Carolina, “Becoming a Member of Faith” (May 2014), 8.


SESSION 8


4. Ibid., 101.


SESSION 9


5. B. H. Carroll, An Interpretation of the English Bible: James, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, ed. J. B. Cranfill (Lake Charles, LA: Cor Meum Tibi), 187-88.


SESSION 10


SESSION 11


SESSION 12


SESSION 13

2. Kyle Idleman, Not a Fan (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 164.

SESSION 14
1. Michael Bird, Evangelical Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 705.


3. Daniel Montgomery and Mike Cosper, Faithmapping, 161.