

## YOU SHALL BE MY WITNESSES

**Speaker:** Rev. Dr. Cecil Clements

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**Scripture:** Acts 1:4-8

John W. Peterson was a prolific writer in the 1970s and 1980s, and we've done many of his anthems. But I think one of the most significant one that he has written is on the Holy Spirit, 'Come Holy Spirit'. I think it can be something that can be sung all the time and can become our prayer each and every day. We need the Holy Spirit as we go through each day and the challenges that may come along with it.

As we are talking about the Holy Spirit, I was reminded that the Holy Spirit appears to be almost the least spoken about in the Trinity in some ways. When we look at the Apostles' Creed, we have a line about God the Father Almighty, Creator of all that. Then we have Jesus and everything that Jesus did. And then we have – "and I believe in the Holy Spirit." Why did it stop there? There's so much more that could be written about the Holy Spirit, and yet, it's not.

Also, apart from being the least known, the Holy Spirit is also feared in some ways. We're fearful about Him having full access, we're fearful about what can happen because when the Holy Spirit comes, there are no boundaries. You can't put Him in a box and say, "Holy Spirit, You can operate in this way. Don't make anything untidy, I've got this all planned out." Our plans don't fit with the Holy Spirit's plans. He just comes and does what He has to do and what is right. So we have no control over the Holy Spirit. Hence we are a little uncertain about inviting Him, or giving Him full access, at times.

Then, He is often misunderstood. Least known, feared, but also misunderstood, because so many of the things that the Holy Spirit does, are not in a category that we can understand. We wonder about it and say, "My goodness! What was that? should that become the norm?" And yet, it's like the Holy Spirit has moved on and said, "I'm going to do new and fresher things along the way." And we're holding on to this and saying, "My goodness! The Holy Spirit was here. He did this; let's re-create this." Then we realize that what we've re-created is just an empty thing – something that is not filled with Him, but just an empty kind of form.

Misunderstood also, because Satan loves to counterfeit the work of the Holy Spirit. He loves to come in and cause chaos and confusion and try to make us decipher between what is true and what is false. So a lot of misunderstanding as well.

Acts 1:4-8

*Gathering them together, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised, "Which," He said, "you heard of from Me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."*

*So when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" he said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; but you will receive power when the*

*Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses, both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."*

The disciples were told to wait in Jerusalem till the Holy Spirit was given to them. They were ready. They had seen Jesus. It seemed that they were ready, and yet for Jesus, they weren't. he said, "You have to wait for the Holy Spirit to come to you." I look at that passage and I think of the 747, my favorite of all the passenger aircrafts. I love its power, its shape, everything about it. It's unfortunate that it's being phased out. Imagine the 747 sitting on the tarmac with everything looking so grand, ready to go; but its four Rolls-Royce engines are missing. And Boeing says, "Hang on. That aircraft may look ready, but till these four Rolls-Royce engines get fitted on, it doesn't have the power to do what it's supposed to do."

In a way, that's what Jesus was saying: "You're ready, and yet you need the power of the Holy Spirit to come upon you. Then, only then, you can be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and all the remotest parts of the earth." Empowered to be witnesses. Think about that for a minute. Jesus was saying something very, very specific to them. He was saying that you are going to be My witnesses. But for you to be My witnesses, you need to be empowered by the Holy Spirit. Only then you can. But you will be My witnesses.

There's a big difference in how the disciples were before the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, and after. I should qualify that by saying – big difference in terms of their boldness, the tenacity with which they went out, the conviction, the passion, and all of that. but there were also other differences that we can note in scripture. And one of them was that they understood scripture better.

In Acts 1:6 they are still talking about the restoration of Israel. They ask Him, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" Yet, in Acts 2, after the Holy Spirit came upon them, Peter was able to stand up and say, "Hey, Listen. These people, these languages that you hear, they are not drunk as you suppose. No, this is a fulfillment of prophecy that the prophet Joel spoke about. He was able to make the connection. It was like the penny dropped. Suddenly, with the empowerment of God's Holy Spirit on the disciples, they began to understand scripture so that they could see it in its entirety. They could see where Jesus had been, what He was talking about and how it affected them, and would affect future generations as well. There was a difference in the way they understood scripture. In fact, Peter went on to preach the first sermon of the church. We can say that Pentecost was the day that the church was formed, when Peter stood up and boldly proclaimed and spoke about all the things that had happened. And 3000 people were added to the church that day. What a difference from the Peter pre-Holy Spirit, and the disciples as well.

"And you shall be My witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and all over the world." That was the mandate that Jesus gave to His disciples. "Be My witnesses."

What is a witness, or who is a witness? The dictionary gives us a definition: a witness is one who sees something, whether it is an event. Typically, it may be a crime or an accident or something like that. Or it can be one who observes, or one who experiences something. That's who a witness is, one who sees, observes or experiences, and then, is able to talk about those three areas, or one of those three areas. But it involves seeing, observing and experiencing.

"You shall be My witnesses," He told the disciples.

**What did they see?**

As they walked with Him over those three years, they must have seen the many people who were healed, the many people He touched. They must have seen the feeding of the five thousand and the four thousand. They must have seen blind Bartimaeus get up and see again. They must have seen the lame begin to walk again. they must have seen the blind begin to see again. they saw so many things as they were with Him.

### **What did they observe?**

They must have observed the way that He dealt with the Pharisees; how He spoke with such authority, how He knew scripture so well. they must have observed the way He spent time away with His Father in prayer. They must have observed the way He was with the poor, the compassion He had on the lepers. All of these things they must have observed.

### **What did they experience?**

They must have experienced His love when He raised Jairus' daughter and He said, "Feed her, she must be hungry." How wonderful to think how Jesus thought! Then, when they came back after He had told them to go out and He had given them authority to cast out demons – they were so excited when they returned, all seventy of them. They were talking to Him and then He almost put His arms around them and said, "Come away and rest awhile." He knew how tired they must be.

You shall be My witnesses of the things that you have seen, the things that you have observed and the things that you have experienced. They were to take these things to the nations, the uttermost parts of the world. But wait for the Holy Spirit to come. all of these things you have, but the empowerment of the Spirit is what you need. Boldness and equipping and empowerment. We saw the boldness with which Peter stood up and spoke. We also heard about the equipping. What was the equipping? To go out into the uttermost parts of the world meant that these simple Galileans (as the crowd talked about them when they began to talk in different languages) suddenly were able to talk in languages that they didn't know, and yet, they were being equipped with the language of the world that they were going into, to be witnesses of Jesus.

The boldness came with the Holy Spirit.

The equipping came with the Holy Spirit.

The empowerment came with the Holy Spirit.

I wonder as you heard the scriptures being read, whether suddenly, as you heard it in your mother tongue, you thought – Hey, that's my mother tongue, that's my language. That's exactly how all those people who were there for the feast of Pentecost felt. They had all come there for the Feast of the First Fruits, as it was at that time. There were people in Jerusalem from all over the known world, of different languages, and yet, they were all listening to their own language from a group of simple Galileans speaking their own language. How wonderful it must have been to suddenly say, "My goodness! I hear my own language." That was the equipping of the Holy Spirit – to take these disciples, these simple people out into a world to be witnesses to all that they had seen observed and experienced by being with Jesus. "You shall be My witnesses," He said, "But wait for the Holy Spirit who will come upon you."

Well, all audiences are the same. In that audience, there were many who looked at what was going on as the disciples talked in different languages. Some were seekers. What is all this? What's going on? We should know about this. They were eager to understand. Then of course, there were the cynics. Seekers and cynics make up most congregations and audiences. Some who were there to know more, and some who were there to find a problem and dismiss it. "These men are just drunk!" Then Peter had to address them and say, "No. These men are not drunk as you suppose, because it is

only 9 o'clock in the morning. this is what the prophet Joel spoke about, that on those days, I will pour out My Spirit upon all people."

Today happens to be the day of Pentecost, where the universal church celebrates the day that the Holy Spirit was given to the church, the day that the church was born, the first sermon as it were, was preached and people were drawn to the Lord. I believe that it must be a reminder for us as well, we too who know Jesus as our Savior, as our Lord, must also be His witnesses. In the places that we are in, we too must be able to talk about what we have seen, what we have observed, and what we have experienced.

But if we are to be witnesses, we have to be witnesses of something. Seen, observed, experienced.

**What have we seen that we can be a witness of?**

What have we seen of Jesus in our lives that we can witness to? Have we seen a change since He came into our lives? Have we seen things being different? Have we seen ourselves beginning to be under the influence of the Holy Spirit rather than our own flesh?

I remember a song that I heard about a dad who is singing and he says, "I come home and my little boy is running to hide behind a chair. But he tells him not to hide, your dad is changed, come out."

I also like this song written by Ernie Haanse

When Paul met the Lord on Damascus Road  
He never was the same again  
When Peter met the Lord, he left his boat  
And started fishing for men  
Well, I may not be Peter or Paul,  
But one thing I can truly say  
When I met the Lord and made Him my choice  
He definitely made a change.

He made a change in the way that I'm walking  
He made a change in the way that I'm talking  
Old things pass away, behold everything's new  
He made a change in the life that I'm living  
I'm born again, set free, finally forgiven  
If He can make a change in me, He can make a change in you.

That would be a witness – to witness about the change that had taken place in my life and in yours.

*2 Corinthians 5:17 – Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come; the old has gone, the new is here.*

**What have we observed about Jesus in our lives?**

People say that seeing is one thing, but observing is something else. Observing is adding a thought process to what was seen. So, are you seeing yourself understanding the Bible? Are you observing yourself finding new and fresh revelation coming down to you? Has your prayer life changed? Are you having greater peace and joy in your life in spite of mitigating and challenging situations? Are you observing that you see things differently?

### **What are we experiencing?**

Are you experiencing the promises that are found in the Word in trying and challenging times? Are you experiencing His grace, His power coming into your areas of weakness? Are you experiencing more of His presence in your life? are worship times beginning to be beautiful times of enjoying God's presence? Is that part of your experience?

I wonder whether Jesus would speak to us today, and say, "I want you to be My witnesses. Under the overpowering presence of His Holy Spirit, I want you to go out and be My witnesses and talk about what you have seen, what you have observed and what you have experienced? Has it come and made a difference in your life?

I wonder whether you've always had a quiet dissatisfaction with your life and your experience of the Holy Spirit. I wonder whether you have talked to yourself saying, "I need more. I want more. I hear and read about so many things in the bible that I haven't experienced at all. I want more of the Holy Spirit in my life."

This Pentecost, I wonder whether that can be your experience, that you open your heart to the Lord and say, "Lord, give me more. Empower me with Your Spirit that I can boldly be a witness to what I've seen and observed and experienced of You in my own life, and maybe in the lives of others. But Lord, I want the empowerment of Your Spirit, I want the equipping of Your Spirit, I want the boldness that comes with Your Spirit."

If that is where you are, why don't you join me as we sing our closing song. Lift up your hands to the Lord and say, "Lord, would You give me more of Your Holy Spirit. Would You give me a Pentecostal type of encounter with You that will transform me from where I am to where You want me to be. so, let the words of this song be an invitation to the Holy Spirit to come in power into your life and mine.

Let Your living water flow over my soul  
Let Your Holy Spirit come and take control  
In every situation that has troubled my mind  
All my cares and burdens unto You I roll.

Come now Holy Spirit and take control  
Hold me in Your loving arms and make me whole  
Wipe away my doubt and fear and take my pride  
Draw me to Your love and keep me by Your side.

O Holy Spirit, would You come and empower us today. Lord, wherever You see an open heart, lifted hands, hearts that are saying to you – we want more. We are not satisfied with the status quo. We want more. O Holy Spirit, would You come like a flood. Surge unto us. Take us out of control. That's okay, but fill us and fill us to overflowing. We ask in Your most precious name, Lord Jesus. Amen.