

Witness Power

by Warren Wiersbe

The sermon emphasizes the importance of excitement, enlightenment, and endowment in effective witnessing, highlighting the role of the Holy Spirit in empowering believers to share the gospel.

Duration: 37:02

Scripture: Genesis 1:1, Genesis 3:15, Genesis 22:1-14, Luke 24:36-47

Topics: "Effective Witnessing", "Holy Spirit"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the essentials for effective witnessing based on Acts chapter 1 and Luke chapter 24. The three essentials are excitement, enlightenment, and empowerment. The first essential is excitement, emphasizing the fact that Jesus is alive. The speaker highlights the importance of personal experience with the living Christ in order to be an effective witness. The second essential is enlightenment, emphasizing the importance of understanding and interpreting the scriptures accurately. The speaker emphasizes that the Bible is the foundation for our message and authority for witnessing. The third essential is empowerment, emphasizing that as witnesses, we are alive and empowered by the Holy Spirit. The speaker encourages the church to rely on the Holy Spirit for boldness and effectiveness in sharing the gospel.

Transcript

Reading the word of God from Luke chapter 24 and beginning at verse 36, our Lord appears to his disciples. Luke 24, 36, And as they thus spoke, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. But they were terrified and frightened, and supposed that they had seen a spirit.

And he said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold, my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Handle me, and see, for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have. And when he had thus spoken, he showed them his hands, and his feet.

And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here anything to eat? And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and a honeycomb, and he took it, and did eat before them. And he said unto them, These are the words which I spoke unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures.

And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things. And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you.

But tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high. And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven.

And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen. Then we turn to Acts chapter 1 beginning at verse 4. And being assembled together with them, he commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which saith he, ye have heard from me.

For John truly baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now. When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power when the Holy Spirit is come upon you.

And ye shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. May God help us to be faithful witnesses. Have you ever had to be a witness at a court case? It's an interesting experience.

I have had to do this on two different occasions, and it didn't take me long to find out what a witness is. The church talks about witnessing in one sense, the court talks about witnessing in another sense, and actually they go together. I discovered very quickly that the judge was not interested in my opinions.

He was not concerned about my prejudices, my theories, or my guesses, or my ideas. He said to me, young man, tell us what you know, not what you think, not what you guess. We want to know what you saw and what you heard.

You are a witness. In Luke chapter 24, the Lord Jesus informs the church that they are witnesses. Acts chapter 1, he informs the church that we are witnesses, not prosecuting attorneys, not judges, not theorists, not even lawyers.

Witnesses telling what we have seen and what we have heard. If you're saved today, it's because somebody came to you with a witness. Did you know that Jesus did not die in Chicago, that the Holy Spirit did not come down in America? You knew that many thousand miles away, several thousand years ago, all of these great events took place.

And we know them today, and we experience today because somebody was faithful to witness. I suppose more than any other thing in our Christian lives, we have a great desire to be better witnesses. So often on our registration cards, we'll find people writing little notes saying, please pray that I'll be a better witness to my family, or I've just been appointed to a new job, pray that I'll be a good witness.

And I'm convinced that many of our people are concerned about this matter of witnessing. You see, each of us is a witness, whether we want to be or not, either for or against. The lives that we live and the things that we say are either pointing people to Christ or pointing people away from Christ.

So the question is not, am I a witness? I am. The question is, what kind of a witness am I? Could God ever sue me for perjury? Looking at Acts chapter 1 and Luke chapter 24 and meditating on it, we discover there are certain essentials for effective witnessing. I need them, and you need them, and the church collectively needs them.

There are three basic essentials for effective witnessing as we discover it in Luke chapter 24 in the life of the early church. And those three essentials can be summed up in three simple words. Excitement, Jesus is alive.

Enlightenment, the word of God is alive. Endowment, we are alive. Now those three words pretty well sum up what witnessing is all about.

Let's take that first word, excitement. Jesus is alive. Have you ever traced the experience of the early believers between Good Friday and Easter Sunday evening? It's interesting.

Four stages. Stage number one, they believed that Jesus was dead. Now they saw him die.

They knew his body had been taken from the tree, wrapped in grave clothes and placed in a tomb. They knew that a stone had been rolled across the door of the tomb and a Roman seal as fixed to that tomb and Roman guards put there to protect the Roman seal. He was dead.

And because he was dead, you find the disciples silent. They had nothing to say. Fearful, behind locked doors, huddling together like birds in a storm, defeated, discouraged, dejected, all of their hope gone, all of their joy gone.

Very self-centered, trying to help one another and there's no help to help with. That was stage one. Jesus is dead.

By the way, many Christians are still in stage one. They live as though Jesus Christ were dead. They're silent, fearful, defeated, discouraged, dejected, huddling together, hopeless, joyless.

Stage two, they heard reports that he was alive. Mary saw Jesus and she comes bustling in and she says, I saw him. He's alive.

I talked to him. They didn't believe it. Two men walking on the road to Emmaus talked with him, discovered who he was, ate with him.

He vanished. They came running into the meeting. They said, Jesus is alive.

We saw him. We ate with him. They didn't believe it.

It's a stage many churches are at today. You call a meeting and the saints come crawling in, defeated, dejected, silent, fearful, hopeless, joyless. And you say, does anyone have anything to share? And someone stands up and says, you know, the Lord did this.

And people look at him. From whence came this strange sight? And someone gets up and says, this past week I had the joy of leading my business partner to Christ. And they look at him.

Don't stir the waters. Don't shake the boat. That's where many people are today.

They've heard reports secondhand. The tomb is empty. The Lord's alive.

But we don't quite believe it. Then they reached the third stage and discovered he was alive. They had a personal meeting with the living Lord.

He comes walking through the locked doors. I'm glad for that. Jesus Christ has the keys, but he doesn't have to use them.

He came walking through the closed doors and he said, peace be unto you. And they looked. He said, it's a ghost.

They were always seeing ghosts when our Lord came walking to them on the water. It's a ghost. He said, it's not a ghost.

Feel me. Look, here are wounds. Ghosts don't have wounds.

By the way, give me something to eat. Now he knew they had something to eat. They always had something to eat.

It's difficult to find the disciples together in the Gospels without the disciples having something to eat. And so he ate before. He said, now look, flesh and bones here.

I'm real. He was saying to them, I'm real. I am a real person.

I am alive here. I have died for you. You can have peace because of my wounds and you can have joy because I'm alive.

Look, here I am. Now, have you come to that stage in your life where the spirit of God has said to you, Jesus Christ is alive. One of my favorite preachers is the great British congregational preacher, R.W. Dale.

I like R.W. Dale, although I disagree with him on some matters, but I like him because he preached Bible doctrine. He didn't preach quiet little devotional messages. His messages were filled with meat, lots of iron, lots of vitamins.

And one morning he was preparing his Easter message and it dawned upon him. It just hit him the way a summer storm suddenly comes upon you. Jesus is alive.

Not just words in a book, not just statements in a creed. Jesus is alive. And he jumped up from his chair and he began to pace the floor of his study saying out loud, he's alive.

He's alive. He is alive. And it transformed his ministry.

From that time on, every Sunday morning when his church gathered for worship, they always sang one resurrection hymn just to keep reminding them that every Lord's day is resurrection day and Jesus is alive. Have you come to that place in your life where you aren't depending upon the evidence? You aren't depending upon the testimony only of someone else? You can say, you asked me how I know he lives. He lives within my heart.

I know that he lives. Now, when they got to that stage, they could move to stage four, letting everybody else know he lives. They began with Jesus is dead.

Others say he's alive. We know he's alive. And then they went out and told others.

Some years ago, when I was studying the book of Acts, I had one of my favorite ideas completely wrecked. It's a good thing the Lord wrecked it because the idea was wrong. There's nothing so humiliating, I guess, as having to bury a wrong idea.

But I had been teaching that the book of Acts was full of the cross of Christ and it isn't. Cross is not mentioned that much in the book of Acts. You know what the emphasis is in the book of Acts? The resurrection.

The resurrection. Acts chapter one, he says, you've got to choose another apostle to be a witness of the resurrection. That was a mark of an apostle.

He had to have seen the risen Christ. And Peter at Pentecost said, we are witnesses of these things that he's alive. And Peter went on to say to that council, we are witnesses of his resurrection all the way through the book of Acts.

The resurrection. The resurrection. He's alive.

Now, that's the first essential for witnessing. Excitement. Jesus is alive.

We don't get excited about the living Christ. There are several ways that we can find out what people are like, find out what they laugh at, find out what makes them weep, find out what they'll sacrifice for, find out what excites them. You learn a great deal about a person that way.

The church isn't excited about the living Christ. We ought to be. The reason that some of our church meetings do not have the life that they need is because we aren't worshipping as people who are excited that Jesus is alive.

I tell you, on that Easter evening when the believers gathered together, they had to stop people. Now, you'd be quiet. Now you tell, oh, I saw him here.

Oh, where'd you see? I saw him over there. And they all had something to share. Why? They'd seen the living Christ.

If I have nothing to share, it probably means I've not been spending time with the living Christ. Excitement. You witness about that which excites you.

Now, the second word is enlightenment. Not only is Jesus alive, but because he is alive, the word of God is alive. Our Lord did not send his disciples out to witness on the basis of their experience alone.

We have too much of that today. He said, now, men, before you go out to witness, let's have a Bible study. Let's talk about the word of God.

I want you to be grounded in the word of God. You see, if you go out only with your witness, somebody else has had an experience. You talk to somebody in the CTA and say, you know, I want to tell you what Jesus Christ means to me.

I've had this experience. And she says, well, or he says, well, I've had an experience too, and talks about something occult or something that relates to a false cult. Is witnessing just matching experiences? Oh, no.

You've got to go beyond experience. You've got to go to the unchanging, infallible word of God. That's what Jesus did.

He said, now, man, I'm glad you're excited because I'm alive. That excitement is great, but you also need something else. There's a second essential.

You need enlightenment. I want the Bible to come alive. Is it not amazing how the saints of God can ignore this book? It's amazing.

The angels in heaven must be totally aghast when they watch the saints get up in the morning. See, angels don't sleep. And they say now they're getting up in Chicago.

Let's watch them. The bunch of Christian schools in the Chicago area, let's watch those Christian students get up. Look, he's not even reaching for his Bible.

Why? That book that cost God's son his life, they're ignoring it. Look, they don't read it. Oh, he's carrying, he's picking it up.

He's carrying it. Oh, he's not reading it. See, we don't get excited about the Bible.

When I was converted as a teenager, I had been raised in Sunday school and church and been confirmed and had learned the Bible mentally. I had never learned it spiritually. And when God saved me, the Bible became a new book to me.

And I had a child's Bible because I wasn't a Bible student and I'd heard there was such a thing as a study Bible. And so I went down to the public library and sure enough, there on the shelf was a Scofield Bible. It had never been taken off the shelf.

And I took that Scofield Bible to the desk and I said, I want to check this book out. I'd lived in that library. From the time I could start reading, I had lived in that.

I knew all the people in the library and I'd worn out I don't know how many cards. And she looked at me. Why are you taking out a Bible? And I did.

I checked the book out. I was walking down the street on a Tuesday carrying my Bible. I met my cousin.

She said, what are you doing with the Bible on Tuesday? I said, I got this at the library. She said, don't you have one at home? I said, yeah, but it's not like this. And I began to study the word of God.

And this book became a living book to me. You know why? I'd met the living Christ. Up till that time, it was just words on a page.

Oh, but what a difference. And the Lord Jesus said, now men, gather around. I'm going to start with Genesis and go through to the end of the book and show you something interesting.

The key to this book is Jesus. Now let's start with creation. I am the word that brought everything into being.

Oh, we understand that. Yeah. I am the seed of the woman who is going to defeat the serpent.

Oh, I am Isaac who gave his life and received a bride. And the Lord just went page after page through Genesis. He talked about Joseph, a picture of Jesus.

He talked about Moses and Aaron. He talked about the sacrifices, the tabernacle, the priesthood, the prophets, the Psalms. And by the time he was through, these men said, we have had our eyes opened.

And the word that is used here for understand, he caused them to understand the scriptures. It's a Greek word that means to put together. A lot of people are good at taking things apart.

They can't put them back together. And up till this point, the apostles had a smattering of this and a picture of that and an idea about this. And when the Lord went through the scriptures, he put it all together for them and said, now here is the basis for what you're going to share.

It is true to the word of God. You see, you can't witness without the Bible. You really can't witness without the Bible, because here is our authority for witness.

Here is the foundation for our message. How do we know these things are true? I've experienced them, but my experience is just as good as your experience. Oh, but ours is based on the Bible, not on fables, not on drugs, not on some man's religious ideas on the word of God.

This is our authority. This is our promise. This is our message.

Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures. He was buried. He arose again the third day according to the scriptures.

Enlightenment. The Bible was alive. What a difference our witness would make if instead of our cute stories, our clever ideas, our Christian salesmanship, we just get excited about the living Christ and enlightened in the living word and share what we know.

If each of us as a believer would spend time every day, every day, every day in the book, get to know Jesus better, get to know his word better. The more we get into the enlightenment of the word, the more we share in the excitement of Jesus Christ. For we find him in this book beyond the sacred page.

I seek the Lord, not outlines, not doctrines, Jesus. And I say to you, you can draw the charts of Daniel's images and be a poor witness. If you don't see Jesus, you can outline the seals and the trumpets of the book of revelation and be a poor witness.

If you don't see Jesus, you can debate theology until you're purple in the face. But if you don't see Jesus, you're not a witness. The enlightenment, the Bible comes alive, but that's not enough.

You'd think that with the excitement of the living Christ and the enlightenment of the word, they were ready to go out and preach. He said, no, no, you got to tarry. You got to wait.

We can't wait. We're anxious. Wait, wait.

Ten more days. The third essential, indument, the Holy Spirit of God. Bible knowledge is no substitute for the Holy Spirit.

Personal experience is no substitute for the Holy Spirit. The missing ingredient in witness today is the power of the spirit of God working in the church. You know, the early church didn't have any of the things

that we have and that we depend on.

Did you know that they had no money, silver and gold? Have I not had no money? We measure churches by their budgets. They had no buildings. We measure churches by their buildings.

They had no prestige. Their pastors were thrown in jail. They had no prestige.

They had no influence in the government. They had no formal education. Now, they were trained, but they had no formal education.

The average church is looking for a pastor. And I've seen some of these questionnaires. I'll send you a 20-page questionnaire.

There are things on there my mother didn't even know. One of the questions is, tell us about your education. Peter would have flunked that.

Now, I'm not against these things. It's good to have them. But education is no substitute for the Holy Spirit.

Nor are buildings or budgets. They had no promotional schemes. They had no media.

That's a great word these days. We need the media. They had none of these things, but they turned the world upside down, scared the devil, glorified the Lord, and won souls by the thousands.

The difference? The Holy Spirit. Now, the word that's used here in verse 49 is endued, which means clothed upon. That's a beautiful picture.

The Holy Spirit clothed upon the believer. It's used of Gideon. It says, and the Spirit of God clothed himself with Gideon.

When I came to Jesus to be saved, I was wearing dirty garments of self-righteousness that he could not accept. He took those dirty garments and dressed me in the robe of righteousness, in the garments of salvation. Then he said, there's a battle going on, so you better put the armor on.

So he put the armor on to be able to fight the battle. Now, he said, there's one more garment you need. There are people out there who need to be saved, and so you better be endued with power, clothed with power, the Holy Spirit of God as a garment giving power for witness.

All of us have had that experience of trying to witness in our own power, and we fell flat on our faces. We got our feet in our mouth, and we didn't know what to say next, and it was over with. We've all had that experience of when the Spirit of God was at work, He was quickening our minds, reminding us of the word, giving us love for these people, and something happened.

Now, there never will be a repetition of Pentecost any more than there's going to be a repetition of Calvary. If a Christian stood up in one of our prayer meetings and said, oh Lord, we pray that once again Jesus would die, we'd sit down and straighten out his theology. But I've heard people pray, oh God, send the Holy Spirit again.

He's not going to do that. He came once. The Holy Spirit came once.

He baptized believers into a body. He filled believers individually, and they spoke out, and people were saved. The endowment.

Not only is Jesus alive, that's excitement. Not only is the word of God alive, that's enlightenment. But the church is alive.

That's endowment. And wherever there has been the work of the Holy Spirit in the church, there has been a great in-gathering of souls. The hindrance to evangelism is not the sinner, it's the saint.

The result of revival is evangelism. Whenever the Spirit of God goes to work in a body of people, convicting of sin, cleansing, working, empowering, the result is revival, and the result of revival is evangelism. We're trying today to have evangelism bring revival.

It won't work. It just won't work. It's backward.

People say, oh, if the church just gets to be evangelistic, you'll have revival. In the New Testament, the church had revival, then it was evangelistic. They were filled with the Spirit.

They were endued with power from on high. You say, how does that happen? Dear friends, it happens when you want it to happen. There are people who say, oh God, fill me with the Spirit that I might be holy.

That's a good reason. Fill me with the Spirit that I might get victory over sin. Well, that's a good reason.

But in the New Testament, people were filled with the Holy Spirit that they might witness. Witness. And I've discovered in my own life that I cannot have a corner on the market of the Holy Spirit for my own selfish purposes.

There are people who want the Holy Spirit for experience. Jesus said the Holy Spirit's going to come, you're going to become witnesses. If you don't want a witness, you won't have the power of the Holy Spirit.

Everything else, love and joy and peace and power and victory, all of these other things are for the purpose of witnessing. And a witness is just somebody who tells what he's seen and heard, doesn't argue. He's not a defense attorney.

He just tells what he knows on the basis of the Word of God and on the basis of his own experience. This is Jesus Christ. And we do this in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Actually, friends, witnessing is not something that we do. It's something that we are. Witnessing is not something that we manufacture.

It's not a cookie cutter, manufactured, cut and dried kind of a thing where we push a button and say, I will now witness. We reach in our pockets for something. No, no, no.

Witnessing is all the time. All the time. The way we eat lunch in the dining room is witnessing.

The way we drive is witnessing. It leads up to the opportunity of sharing Jesus Christ with people. And I think our churches today and preachers today and I stand as the first candidate.

Church members today desperately need these essentials. Excitement. Jesus is alive.

We wake up in the morning. The first thing we ought to say is, Lord, you're alive. And you've watched over me now.

Here I am. Here is my body. Take me.

We reach for the Bible. The Bible is alive. Enlightenment and our living Savior speaks to us through this book and talks to us and we see him.

And then there's endowment. I must want to be filled and I must be cleansed to be filled and I must ask to be filled and I must believe to be filled. I do not look for signs.

I do not look for miracles. You can tell when the Holy Spirit has filled you. Just take his ministry.

What's one of his ministries? To remind you of the Word of God. When you find the Word of God just flowing in and through you. That's the fullness of the Spirit.

What is his ministry? To bear fruit. When you find you have love and joy and peace and patience. That's the Holy Spirit filling you.

What's the work of the Holy Spirit? Witnessing. When you find that the witness just comes naturally. It's not turned on and off like the faucet.

That's the Holy Spirit. He's working through you. Oh, what a beautiful thing it is just to have this constant filling of the Spirit of God.

The endowment. I firmly believe that every ministry I have performed apart from the Holy Spirit's power will go up in smoke. It makes no difference how great the book may have been or how marvelous the sermon may have been if it has not been in the power of the Holy Spirit.

It's going up in smoke. God acknowledges that which has been touched by the Holy Spirit. And some of our fundamental Christians because others are fanatics are afraid of the Holy Spirit.

Oh, my friend, don't be afraid of him. He lives in you and he wants to fill you. These three words come to my mind.

Excitement. Jesus is alive. We've got something to talk about.

Enlightenment. The Word of God is alive. There's a foundation for what we say.

But oh, that third essential. Endowment. The church must be alive.

How does this happen? The Holy Spirit of God clothes himself upon us and uses us. And our hands become his hands to touch lives. And our feet become his feet to walk up to doors and push buttons.

And our eyes become his eyes to see the multitude lost. Sheep having no shepherd. And our ears become his ears to hear the cry, come over and help us.

And then our mind becomes his mind and our lips become his lips. And we speak out the word of truth. Just a handful of people in Jerusalem without press agents, without radio, without television, without newspaper, telephone, printing press, money, prestige, formal education or social status.

Turn the place upside down because they had a living Christ and a living word and a living experience with the Holy Spirit. What will we do? Heavenly Father, we have prided ourselves in good theology, organization. We're thankful, Father, for all that you've given to us as individuals and as a church.

We're thankful for the tools that we have in terms of money and equipment and buildings. We're thankful for the people that we have who faithfully labor. But Lord, our prayer today is not just to thank you for what we have, but to confess what we don't have.

Lord, some of us need this excitement that Jesus is alive. Some of us need this enlightenment that the word of God is alive. And oh, so many more of us need this endowment, the filling of the Holy Spirit.

We confess our need. Oh, may the wind of God blow upon this congregation. Oh, gracious Father, save us from ourselves, from pettiness, and help us to focus our eyes upon a world, billions of people looking for a witness.

May we be faithful. I pray for that one here today who has heard the witness, who knows his need and has not yet received. May he trust Christ and be born from above.

I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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