

How to Finish Christ's Work

Acts 1:1-11

1236

I told you this morning that we were going to depart from our series today in Jude because the Lord had really been speaking to me this week as I was sharing with the pastors up in Oregon. And we were talking the key factors in really seeing the church explode, and really seeing the power of God evident in the life of the believers. And so many of the pastors, as I said this morning, are frustrated in the area of seeing their people really be productive. And we thought this morning on one very important thing, and that is how the individual Christian releases power so he can become what God wants him to be.

And tonight I want to talk about another thing that's tied right into that. When we are in the position of really seeing the power of God in our lives, when we really yield to the Spirit of God, as we talked about this morning, what it is that we are called upon to do? I don't really think that all Christians understand their ministry.

I'm reminded of a story which I included at the close of the book that I wrote on the church. A London Timesreporter was interviewing people who were helping to build the great cathedral in London. The architect was Sir Christopher Wren, a very famous architect. And the name of the cathedral...and it still stands, of course...is St. Paul's. And the London Timesreporter was going along checking with various workmen just to keep up with the progress of the construction. And he came to one man, and he said to him, "What are you doing?" And he says, "I'm putting this rock in the slot; isn't it obvious?" He came to a second man doing the very same thing, and he said, "What are you doing, sir?" He said, "I'm earning a day's living." He came to a third man doing identically the same thing, and he said, "What are you doing, sir?" He said, "Why I'm helping Sir Christopher Wren build St. Paul's Cathedral." I guess it all depends on your perspective, doesn't it?

And I wonder sometimes if Christians really understand what they're doing. For some Christians, it's just kind of like sticking a rock in a slot...it's just kind of filling time. For other Christians, I think it's just kind of, "Well, I'm trying to earn my reward so that when I get to Heaven, you know, I get a halfway decent place." But I wonder if we really understand that the Christian life is all about helping the Lord Jesus Christ to finish the work that He began.

You know, I am not an artist by any stretch of the imagination. I always remember a black panther I drew in the 6th grade and got an "F" on it.

[Laughter]

You never forget those things, do you? She didn't even know what it was.

[Laughter]

I'm not an artist, but I love art.

And when I was in Rome, I had the privilege of seeing just the proliferation of art that overwhelms you. And I remember the thing, I suppose, that was the most overwhelming to me was the sculpture that I saw. And I couldn't help but wonder how it would have been...I was looking at all of Michelangelo and Bernini and all these other fantastic masters...how it would have been if Michelangelo had said to me, "Look, MacArthur"...I hadn't been around at that time, of course...and he just said, "Look, I finished everything but the face. Would you do it for me?"

[Laughter]

What do you want, a happy face?

[Laughter]

That would be about it. Or if some great master painter had said, "Look, I finished everything on this portrait but the eyes. Would you finish them?" Oh, no. I wouldn't ever want to lay my hand to a Michelangelo. I would never want to touch a painting by the masters. Now if I had started it, I wouldn't mind finishing it; nobody would expect anything. But I wouldn't want to adulterate a master.

Well, do you know what is a sobering thought to me? If you think it would be shocking to have to finish off a Michelangelo or a Rembrandt or whatever, imagine what it is for us as Christians to finish the work that Jesus began. Now that's a sobering thought.

I want you to look at verse 1 of Acts 1. You know, I think Christians talk a lot about the finished work of Christ, and we should. Because on the cross when our Lord said, "Taytellust I," He said it is finished. And He did finish the work of redemption. And there is that finished work of Christ, and we thank God for it. When he finished the work on the cross, it meant there was nothing to be added to it. There was nothing that you or I could do to add to that, it's done. Salvation is a finished work.

But did you ever know that Jesus had an unfinished work? Look at Acts 1:1. "The former treatise"...and this is Luke recalling his Gospel, his earlier narrative..."The former treatise"...and the actual Greek terminology here seems to refer to a part one of a narrative, or a two-part narrative, so he's referring to part one, the Gospel of Luke..."Have I made oh Theophilus"...translates "friend of God"... "Of all that Jesus"...what's the next word? "Began."

Now isn't it interesting that when we talk so much about the finished work of Christ, we face here that very evident reality that Jesus only began something. Now what is it that Jesus only began? He began to do and teach. The rest of the Book of Acts tells the story in part, and the story is still being told right today, of finishing the work that Jesus began. And when it is finished, what happens? Christ returns. We are in the process right now of finishing the work which Jesus began.

All through the Book of Acts, we have evidence that the men of God understood this. In Acts chapter 20, for example, the Apostle Paul was on his way to Jerusalem. And on the trip, he was constantly

being warned that when he got to Jerusalem, he was going to run into a lot of trouble, and that the trouble was going to be extremely serious. He had been told that he would be bound. He had been told that he would be put in prison, that he would suffer pain.

And in Acts 20-22 he recounts something of this: "And now behold, I go bound in the Spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there, except that the Holy Spirit witnesses in every city saying that bonds and afflictions await me. Every city I go to, the Spirit of God reminds me that if I keep going to Jerusalem, I'm going to get it." Verse 24..."But none of these things move me. Neither count I, my life, dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus." Stop there.

Paul says, "Look, I only have one thing that I'm concerned about. My life doesn't matter to me. All I want to do is finish my part of the unfinished work of Christ," you see? "That's all I want to do. I'm not protecting my hide. I'm not making great investments in my welfare. I am expendable as long as I finish my part of the unfinished work of Christ." Now that's what motivated the man.

You know, I have this sense of motivation, and I picked it up from the Apostle Paul and from my understanding of Acts 1:1...that I must finish the work that Christ has given me. Now I don't know how much time I have, but I know I have a limited amount of time.

In 1 Peter chapter 1 verse 17, it says that "If you call on the Father who, without respect of persons, judges according to every man's work" ...listen..."pass the time of your sojourning here in reverence." If you know that the Lord is going to evaluate your work, then pass the time of your sojourning with reverence. Notice the definite article, "the time." There is a definite time...I believe there is a definite time of life assigned to us. And there is a definite ministry to be finished in that time.

In Job 14:14, it says, "All the days of my appointed time will I wait 'til my change come." And he's referring there to the change that's going to come after death. "All the days of my appointed time." Job knew that his time was bounded by the sovereignty of God...he knew that. He knew that he only had so much time until he would die; and I think the great men of the Bible lived with that kind of perspective.

In Psalms 89:47, it says, "Remember how short my time is." My time again...a very definite kind of concept. In Ephesians 5:16, it says that, "Because the days are evil, we are to do" what with the time? "Redeem the time." Buy it up, maximize it. We need to work on a full effort basis in order to fulfill our part of the unfinished work of Christ in the time that He has given us. I realize I only have so much time. And if I am to finish the work that Christ gave me, I've got to maximize the time that I have. That's the way Paul felt.

Now let's go back to Acts 1, and let's see what flows out of this first verse. Luke says, "I wrote earlier about all that Jesus began." Now he says, "I am writing a book, the Book of Acts, about all that Jesus continued to do through His people." That's what the whole Book of Acts is all about...finishing the unfinished work of Christ, picking up where Jesus left off, picking up the chisel and the hammer and finishing the sculpture, picking up the brush and finishing the canvas...that's what you and I are called to do.

Now in order for us to do that, we have to have some ingredients, and I want to share six of them

with you tonight just briefly. These are the things that are needed for you and I to finish the unfinished work of Christ.

Number one is the proper message. It's obvious that if we're going to finish the thing that Jesus began, we're going to have to be in the continuity. Notice verse 1 and 2: "The former treatise of ImatoTheophilus of all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day in which He was taken up after He, through the Holy Spirit, had given commandments unto the apostles." And at the end of verse 3, it adds this: "Speaking of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God."

Now the thing that Jesus did continually in His work, the thing that He did repeatedly, was give out the proper information. The message had to be right. So until the day in which He ascended through the Holy Spirit, He continually gave commandments to the apostles. All through the ministry that Jesus had with those men for the three years, He'd take them away and teach them. He'd take them to a mountainside and teach them. He'd take them to the Mount of Olives and teach them. He'd take them to an upper room and teach them. He'd take them in the midst of the crowd and teach them through parables while screening out the people. He would continually be giving them the word, giving them the things pertaining to the Kingdom.

And here it refers to after His resurrection...40 days He was on the earth, and during that time, He appeared to them periodically and confirmed His word, continued to speak of His Kingdom, and continued to give them commandments. And the reason He did was so that we might have this deposit, that we might know the proper message.

You can never finish the work of Christ unless you know what the content of His message was. Wouldn't it have been a horrible thing if the Lord had said, "Finish My work," and never given us any information about it? But He's given us the Word.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 2, it says in verse 9, "As it is written, eye hath not seen nor ear heard." eye other words, this information is not available to empirical study. Neither has it entered into the heart of man. It's also not available to philosophy, the things which God has prepared for them that love Him. "But God has revealed them to us by His Spirit, for the Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God."

And verse 13, "Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing Spiritual things with Spirits." He says that we who are Christians have the truth from the Holy Spirit. We have it here, and the Holy Spirit instructs us in it.

Now our Lord Jesus Christ was faithful to teach. Right content is the foundation of any faithful ministry. You can never ever finish the work of Christ unless you have proper content. And I've said this so many times, that the one great anxiety that I have for the church is the fact that it is so ignorant.

Some years ago, I told you about a Time Magazinetest in which the people who'd been in Sunday school for X number of years, and had been in church for X number of years were surveyed by Time Magazineto see how much they knew about the Bible to evaluate the Christian training. And the answers to the test were unbelievable. They answered things like this: "Sodom and Gomorrah were lovers. The gospels were written by Matthew, Mark, Luther, and John. Jesus was baptized by Moses.

Jezebel was Ahab's jackass." That one they got right.

[Laughter]

But one of the great tragedies of the church is ignorance. And it comes to us in Josiah in these words: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." And as we've said so many times, God never puts a premium on ignorance. But that, the church suffers from. And the reason we have so much difficulty finishing the unfinished work of Christ is because we don't know what the message is. And substituting for the true message are all kinds of messages. People are propagating inconceivable messages in the name of Christianity.

The Apostle Paul knew what the message was, and he preached it and stayed with it. In Acts 17:1, "When they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where it was a synagogue of the Jews. And Paul, as his manner was, went into them, and three Sabbath days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures, dialogued with them, opening and alleging that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead, and that this Jesus whom I preach unto you is the Messiah, and some of them believed." Now that is the message...the message of the Kingdom...that Jesus is the Messiah, that He died because He had to die to pay the penalty of sin, that He rose from the dead. He reasoned with them out of the Scriptures.

In verse 10 of the same chapter, "And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea, who coming there went to the synagogue of the Jews again. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica in that they received the Word with all readiness of mind and searched the Scriptures daily. Whether those things were so, therefore many of men believed." The message is Jesus Christ, dead and risen again, and the Scriptures...that's the message. And your effectiveness and my effectiveness in finishing the unfinished work of Christ is directly related to our understanding of the Word.

A friend of mine said to me one night...he said, "You know, a guy came up to me and he asked me a question about Christianity, and I couldn't answer it." And he said, "I was frustrated. I knew the answer, but I couldn't remember any of the references. And the guy wanted to know, and I stumbled around and made an idiot out of myself." And he said, "I went home, and I said to myself, 'that will never happen to me again.'"

That's what Peter said when he said that we ought to have a reason for the hope that is in us so that we can give an answer to every man that asks us, right? We need to be able to defend the faith.

Walter Martin says it's a tragedy, but the average Christian can be taken apart by a 90-day wonder out of the Jehovah's Witnesses in about 30 minutes. And this demands that we study the Word of God. Unfortunately, Christians are associated with a lack of content. Christians are often associated with a lack of information.

A few years, a guy came up to me on the patio, and he wanted to show me an ad in the Hollywood Reporter. The Hollywood Reporter is a trade paper for the movie people. And the ad talked about a Bible Land, which was sort of a sanctified Disneyland that they were building someplace. And you know, they were going to do the whole thing...I think it was a \$27 million proposal. You could get thrown up by a whale, and they had all kinds of rides.

[Laughter]

And I mean it was bizarre, really bizarre. But all...everything was Bible-oriented. And they had ads for all the people they needed, and it was serious. They needed carpenters and engineers who could design and construct a Red Sea that parted. And they needed certain things to build this and that and all...they went on and on...about 30 things. But the thing that actually knocked me over was this one, and this is a direct quote. It said, "Wanted"...they wanted midgets too for certain little scenes, all kinds of things, but it said this: It said, "Wanted males, 6'3", 200 pounds, handsome, dark, to play the part of Jesus...must know four Spiritual laws." Now there's nothing wrong with the four Spiritual laws, but when the world thinks that's what Jesus knows, we're hurting. To play the part of Jesus, you have to know the four Spiritual laws...incredible!

Well, you see, this comes because Christians don't always come across with very much content. To finish the work that Jesus began, we have to know the message. And that's why all through His ministry, he poured that message out. That message is recorded in the gospels and commented on in the rest of the New Testament. And the better we know the gospels and the better we know the commentary on the gospels, which is the Epistles, the better able we are to defend the truth, right? That's why the Bible says, "Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not" what? "To be ashamed." Cutting a straight line for the Word of God.

Man, sometimes I wonder even about our evangelism. There are so many dangers. There's the danger of evangelism that is experience-centered. Do you know what that is? That's, "Well, let me give my testimony. I was this, and I was this, and I was this." And you go on and on about all of your life. "And I did this, and then it all...and why don't you do it?" You know, well, that's...a testimony is good. But there's more to coming to Christ than just that.

I picked up...we get a lot of papers in the church office. Every organization mails us their paper. And some of them...we call them the "Christian funny papers"...but some of them are really kind of funny, and they mean well, but they're just kind of funny. And one of them had an article on how to build your Sunday night service. And so I thought, "Well, I'll read that; it will be interesting." And I read it, and it said, "Here's one great way to build your Sunday night service: Have testimonies from strange and unusual people."

[Laughter]

Well, that's nothing new. Every time we have testimonies, there are a few strange and unusual people.

And it suggested one that was really great. It was a 38-inch-tall lady who would come up and sit on your pulpit and really add a zinger...38-inch-tall lady. "And over in this tent, we have the tattooed man," see?

[Laughter]

"And over here, we have the snake charmer." It's a sideshow effect.

I'm not against giving out testimony because I've done it many times. But I'm just careful in my own mind to realize that true presentations of Christianity involve much more than a testimony. They involve proper content, and the truths of the Kingdom have to be there.

It's so easy for us to approach people on experience. Peter says in 1 Peter chapter 1...he says...verse...well, let's try 2 Peter; that's where he said it.

[Laughter]

2 Peter chapter 1...I'm getting my first and seconds all mixed up tonight. He says, "I want you to remember these things." And verse 16, "We have not followed cunningly devised fables." But the end of verse 16, "We were eyewitnesses." He says, "I'm giving you my testimony, folks. I'm telling you my testimony." Nothing wrong with that, but watch this...verse 19..."We have also...not only our testimony...but we have a more sure word of prophecy." What is that? Verse 20..."That know prophecy of the Scripture." Testimony is good, but what's a more sure word than testimony? What is it? Scripture. "For the prophecy that is the Scripture came not at any time by the will of man. But Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." A more sure word than experience is the Word of the Scripture. We got to know the Word, or we can't finish the work that Jesus began...it behooves us to study.

And it's so easy. Sometimes you get trapped in that experience-centered Christianity, where all you've got to say to anybody is all about your experience, and there isn't any content there. I mean this is my argument in one area with the charismatic movement as we see it today. It's all experience. Everybody's got an experience, but nobody knows anything about the Scripture. That's a blissful ignorance of the Word of God.

And then of course there's also the danger of an ego-centered approach in evangelism. And that's the idea where all you're really doing is appealing to somebody's ego. How would you like...wouldn't you like...wouldn't this be wonderful? How would you like this? Well, who wouldn't, see?

[Laughter]

It's very dangerous. Make sure, people, that if we're going to finish the work that Jesus began, we're going to have to teach what Jesus taught, right? And Jesus didn't stop teaching with the gospels. That's why I tell you, I don't like red letter Bibles. That assumes that only what Jesus said is important. Jesus taught all through the Epistles of Paul, did he not? Jesus taught all through the Epistles of John, James, Jude, Peter, and everybody else that wrote in the New Testament. The Lord continued to speak His truth, and it behooves us to know that truth.

Now, one note at the end of verse 1: "Jesus began to do and teach." Did you notice that there's an interesting parallel there? Whatever Jesus taught, He also what? Did. You know, this is the credibility factor, isn't it? Don't tell me what you tell me unless you show me that what you tell me is what you are. Practice what you preach.

And Jesus said in Matthew 23...he says, "Hey, the Pharisees sit in the seat of Moses, so you listen to what they say. Just don't do what they do." But with Jesus, He began to do it and to teach it...the

proper message.

Now also, if we're going to finish the work that Christ began, we have to have, secondly, the proper manifestation. Notice verse 3...I love this...talking of the apostles here, he says, "To whom also He showed Himself alive after his death"...that's what His passion refers to..."by many infallible proofs being seen by them 40 days." Stop there. Now Jesus knew it wasn't enough just to have information. There had to be, to those apostles, a personal manifestation. And so He appeared to them at special and repeated intervals so that they might know that He was alive.

In John chapter 20, Jesus appears to the disciples. Verse 19...the same evening...the first day of the week, and the doors were shut. That means they were locked. The disciples were so afraid, and they thought, "Oh, the Messiah is gone." They were scattered...the sheep without a shepherd...and everything is crumbled. And they were hiding in this place with the door locked because they were afraid of the Jews. They thought the Jews would send the temple police and capture them all. The same fate that happened to Jesus would happen to them, and they were cowering in this little room.

And then it says, "Came Jesus and stood in the midst." Now you say, "How did He get in there?" He went right through the wall and said unto them, "Peace." And I know why He said peace. Because if I had been in that room, and somebody had come through the wall...

[Laughter]

... I would have liked if he'd said "Peace." "He showed them His hands and His sign, and then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord. You see, they needed to see Him. They needed to know that He was alive. Then said Jesus to them again, "Peace be unto you as My Father has sent Me, even so, send I you."

Now there was somebody absent...Thomas...and that's what he gets for not being there. Verse 24...he wasn't around. The next time he was, and he saw the Lord. Verse 28...Thomas answered and said, "My Lord and my God."

Verse 26 is interesting. It says, "After eight days again, His disciples were inside, and Thomas was with them. Then came Jesus. They've still got the place locked. He came...the doors being shut, stood in the midst and again said 'Peace.'"

Now notice verse 30: "And many other signs truly did Jesus"...now here it is..."in the presence of his" what? "Disciples." We don't have the record. It says they're not written in this book. Some of them occurred before His death, some of them likely after it...after His resurrection. Other things that He did to prove Himself to them.

In chapter 21...do you remember the great story there? Jesus said to Peter, "I'm alive from the dead. You're going to be my man. You're going to be my feeder of the flock. You're going to be my undershepherd. Now you go to Galilee and you wait until I get there. I'm going to test your faith, and you see how patient you are." Peter is up there in Galilee, standing on the side of a hill, looking at his sundial all the time, saying "Where is the Lord?" Impatient Peter. And finally he disobeyed and went fishing, and you know the story, how the Lord rerouted all the fish, and none of them came near him. Finally the Lord appeared, and He had a conversation. He restored Peter and showed Himself alive

to Peter.

1Corinthians chapter 15 tells us in verse 5, it starts, "And He was seen of Peter, then of the 12. And after that, He was seen of 500 brethren at once, of whom the greater part remained to this present time, but some were falling asleep. And after that, He was seen of James, then of all the apostles, and last of all, He was seen of me also as one born out of due time." So Paul says, "He made appearances to the apostles and even to me." Why? Because it was necessary that they know that He was alive." Why? Because a man, in order to carry the work of Christ, had to come out of a vital relationship with a living Christ and have confidence that He was alive.

And I say this to you, people: We cannot finish the unfinished work of Christ unless it flows out of a vital reality of Christ in our lives, unless we're seeing and feeling and knowing and fellowshiping and sharing with Him. You can't be a secondhand witness. You can't give somebody else's testimony. You can't pass on Scripture that is irrelevant to you because you've never personally met Jesus Christ. You say, "Yeah, but I can't see Him." Well, you don't need to see Him.

Peter says, in 1 Peter 1:8, "Whom having not seen, you" what? "You love." He makes himself visible by the indwelling Spirit. And we have the record of the infallible appearances. We have the record of His 500+ witnesses. We have the record of the empty tomb. We have the record that the Romans bribed the soldiers. And the Jews were in on the whole thing in order to say that He was dead and His body was stolen, rather than to admit that He arose from the dead. We have all the evidence that He is alive, and the evidence is consummated because we know Him to be alive in our lives.

And therein lies the proper manifestation. And out of that manifestation can flow a firsthand message. I couldn't get so excited about Jesus Christ if I didn't know that He was alive. I couldn't get excited about Him if I didn't know that He was in my life, and that He had proven Himself to have risen from the dead. All right, in order to finish the unfinished work of Christ, we have to have the proper manifestation as well as the proper message.

Thirdly, we need to have the proper might, and this relates to power. Look at verse 4...and this is kind of funny really..."And being assembled together with them, He commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem." Yeah, that kind of hit me the first time I studied that. He says, "And now you have the proper message. I've taught you, and you have all this message...three years...plus I've been teaching you and commanding you and giving...and you have the proper manifestation. You know that I am alive, and you've seen Me, and you've touched Me, and you've declared my Lord and my God. You've had all of this. Now men, do nothing." Which would have been sort of an anticlimax, wouldn't you think?

And he says, "But wait." What are you waiting for? "Wait for the promise of the Father which you've heard from Me." Well, what do you mean? Don't fire out in your own strength. Don't just blast off in your own energy. You see, that would be like Me with My chisel, taking over that face from Michelangelo. I would mess that thing up. The Lord says, "Don't go anywhere; just wait for the promise of the Father."

You say, "Now what is the promise of the Father?" Well, listen and I'll read it to you. In Luke 11:13, here's the promise of the Father...just listen: "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Heavenly Father give" what? "The Holy Spirit to them that

asks." What is the gift of the Father? What is it? It's the Holy Spirit. Wait for the promise of the Father. And the Spirit, you see, the Spirit could not be sent until Jesus went to the Father. Jesus said in John 14 to 16 that "He would go and send the comforter, and He would have to be there before the comforter could come. The comforter was sent to the believers as a reward from the Father for the faithful work of Christ." Don't go anywhere until the Spirit comes.

Verse 5..."For John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit, not many days from now." Just hang on...the Spirit of God is going to come. Now here we're introduced to the concept of the baptism of the Spirit. We're not going to take time to get into it. Suffice it to say this: 1 Corinthians 12:13 describes this truth explicitly and in clear terms. And what it says is this: "For by one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether it be Jews or Greeks, bond or free, and we have been all made to drink into one Spirit." Every Christian possesses the Holy Spirit.

Romans 8:9 says, "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he's none of His." We all receive the same Spirit. We were all baptized by the same Spirit. And the baptism of the Spirit is the placing of the believer into the body of Christ, and it occurs at the time of salvation. So wait until you receive the Spirit, is what he's saying..."Wait until the Spirit places you in the body and indwells you."

Then verse 8...then you will receive what? "Power after the Holy Spirit has come on you." That's why to wait. Because if you try to do it on your own, you wouldn't have the energy. "You shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit"...that's a classic use of the passive verb..."you shall be baptized." You don't earn it, you don't generate it, you just get it from God sovereignly. There's no effort involved. The Spirit of God descends and comes as the Father sends Him. And what happens? The result? Power.

Now, you see, it would be like Michelangelo saying, "Now MacArthur, I want you to finish this, but I'll hold both your hands." Oh, that's different. Then it would be exciting, wouldn't it? I mean then I'd feel like, "Wow, you know, I've held the hands of the master while he did his work. I've been a part of it." And that's essentially what God is saying here...what Christ is saying to his disciples..."I want you to finish My work. I'll give you all the tools you need. And just to make it possible, I'm going to put My Holy Spirit inside of you, and He'll do it through you" if you'll yield to him.

The power to accomplish, the power to fulfill, the power to do the thing that God has given us to do, is the energy of the indwelling Holy Spirit. And isn't that what we talked about this morning in detail? Releasing that divine power through the Holy Spirit.

And so, you see, as Christians, we have the proper message right here in the Word of God. We have the proper manifestation. We know that Jesus rose from the dead. We have all the evidence, plus the fact that He lives within us. We also have the proper might. He's given us His Holy Spirit. And His Holy Spirit has the power to do exceeding abundantly above all we can ask or think, right?

But there's something else he gave. He said, "Fourthly, you also need the proper mystery." And this is great...look at verse 5. He says, "You're going to receive the Holy Spirit not many days from now." Man, that just flipped their eschatological triggers. When they heard that..."Not many days from now, guys, did you hear that?" They figured, "Wow, the Messianic age is going to start any minute." They were waiting for Christ to take over the world because they associated the coming of the Holy Spirit with the end of the age.

People always ask me, "Do you think we're in the end times?" Of course. We've been in the end times for 2,000 years. We've been in the end times since the Messiah came the first time. 1 John says, "My little children, it is the last days." The last days are lasting a long time, but we've been in them for 2,000 years. And when it started, then Messiah came the first time...they didn't know there'd be that 2,000-year parenthesis period before Christ set His Kingdom up. They didn't have any idea about that. They figured, "The Messiah is here. He's risen from the dead. He's alive. Whammo, here comes the Kingdom."

They knew Ezekiel...Ezekiel 36..."Ezekiel said He would take away the stony heart and give them a heart of flesh, and He would put His Spirit within them." So they associated Joel 2, Ezekiel 36..."Wow, Messiah comes, plants His Spirit in us. His Spirit takes over, and the Kingdom comes." They didn't see any gap. So when Jesus said he's coming not many days, they figured this is it.

Verse 6..."When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, 'Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the Kingdom to Israel? Is this it? Is this the time?'" And I love his answer. 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." What He really said was, "None of your business."

[Laughter]

That, my friends, is the proper mystery. We don't need to know when Jesus is coming, right? You know, I worry...if I knew when Jesus was coming, I'd be tempted to just kind of fool around until He just about was ready, and slide in under the wire, and crank out a lot of things. And if it was a long way off, I think I'd waste time. If it was near, I think I'd panic. So He doesn't tell us. And He says, "You don't need to know that." The Father has that in His own power, and He will come when He wants to come.

The Greek order of their question is, "Lord, at this time, wilt thou restore the Kingdom to Israel? Is this the hour?" He says, "None of your business." You just stay with it, folks. Don't worry about those details.

Do you know there are some Christians today that just really are...they just get so preoccupied with the second coming. You know, about every other month, they're up on the roof in their pajamas looking up, you know.

[Laughter]

And that's about all they ever talk about..."Well, the Lord is coming." And there's that guy running around that said Jesus was coming September 6th...you know, Charles Taylor, or whatever his name is, wrote a book, and he had it all figured out...the Lord is coming September 6th. I wish they wouldn't do that, because when they do that, then He won't come. Because He says He wouldn't come in an hour that we think He'll come. So if people keep setting dates, He'll never get here!

[Laughter]

In Mark chapter 13 and verse 32, "That day and that hour knoweth no man...know not the angels who are in Heaven, neither the Son but the Father." Christ in His incarnation even restricted His own

knowledge. He says, "Take heed. Just be ready. Watch and pray, for you know not when the time is. For the Son of Man is like a man taking a far journey who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch." He gave orders...He told you what to do...do it. "Watch you therefore, for you know not when the master of the house comes...at evening, at midnight, at cock-crow, or in the morning. Lest coming suddenly, He finds you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all...watch." What He means is, "Be ready, be alert, be busy, be serving, occupy until I come." Not on the roof looking up, not rocking back and forth in an eschatologicalcoma, saying, "Oh, He'll be here soon." You know, I listen to people like that, and they go on and on, "Oh, it will be wonderful. The Lord is going to"...and they're doing absolutely nothing but waiting.

I believe there are indications the Lord is going to come. I believe there are many signs around us, and we've shared those with you. But at the same time, I realize that the rapture is a signless event. And it's eminent...He can come any time. We don't need to know that. We just need to be busy watching, being alert, and occupying until He comes.

So he gave us the proper message, manifestation, might, and mystery, and then fifth, the proper mission. While we're waiting for Him to come, and as long as we've got the message and the manifestation and the might, or the power, what do we do? What is the Christian supposed to be doing? Verse 8...the middle of the verse..."And you shall be" what? "Witnesses unto Me, both in Jerusalem, in all Judea, and Samaria, and the outermost part of the earth."

Incidentally, that is the outline of the Book of Acts. The first section deals with Jerusalem...Judea, the second with Samaria; and the third section of Acts from chapter 13 or 14 on deals with the outermost part of the earth. That's the spread of the Gospel.

But what is our mission to be witnesses? You know the Christian mission is very simple, but boy do we fog it up.

I read a very interesting thing...the parable of the shepherd...I don't know if you ever read it. There was a shepherd who counted his sheep, and a bunch of them were missing. So he was very concerned about the missing sheep. He must get them into the fold. So he hired a sheepdog. And he sent his sheepdog out to find the missing sheep, and all he got was a tired dog. And then, you know, he found a whole lot of other shepherds who had missing sheep, and they had a "shepherd with missing sheep" conference.

[Laughter]

Do you get the picture? And they sat around and tried to strategize, and they appointed a subcommittee to study the missing sheep problem. Someone came up with neon signs, "Here, sheep, here."

[Laughter]

Others came up with bumper stickers saying, "Come, sheep, come." Some even came up with sweatbands...a little more subtle. And then some decided that there was an outstanding sheep rock group that would surely attract the missing sheep. It's all kind of ridiculous, isn't it?

Jesus was a shepherd, and when He lost His sheep, what did He do? Went out and found it. You know, it's amazing what we can do in committee that we could never do individually, for some strange reason. You know, and we invent Gospel blimps...have you read the book, Gospel Blimp? The guy wanted to witness to his neighbors, so what did he do? Hired a blimp and dropped tracks in his backyard.

[Laughter]

A guy was telling me the other day...we were talking about that book...and he says, "I know a guy who read that book and wanted to know how he could rent a blimp."

[Laughter]

*(Laughter)*Wow. What is our mission? Our mission is to be a witness. You say, "What is a witness?" Well, I had the experience of being in on an attempted murder one time. And it wasn't myself...I just got involved in it...embroiled in it...because I approached the guys who were trying to kill this guy and try to stop it. And to make a long story short...I think I told you this before...I got punched around a little bit. My dad got punched. And to make a long story short, after all this maylay was over, the guy lived, and so forth and so on. We went to court, and it was a very harrowing experience for me. I mean I'm no great hero, you know. I thought the guy was smaller than he was. The closer I got to the action, the bigger he got.

[Laughter]

He turned out to be huge...he was about 6'5", 255-260. And he had a police record as long as your arm, and he's dead now...he was killed in a bar after this, so he was a bad man. And I was out there thinking that I was, you know, going to help. And I saw him and...*(Laughter)*you know ...

[Laughter]

But anyway, after it was all over, I went to court. And I got to court...I'll never forget what happened. The attorney said to me, after he'd sworn me in, he said, "Mr. MacArthur, we'd like you to tell the court what you saw, what you heard, and what you felt." I'll never forget those three things. Because my mind immediately went to 1 John 1:1..."That which we have seen with our eyes."

[Laughter]

You don't think I'm programmed?

[Laughter]

"That which we've seen with our eyes, heard with our ears, and our hands have handled concerning the word of life, declare we unto you." That's a witness...declaring to somebody what he saw and heard and felt.

Now you know, you don't decide to be a witness. You just decide what kind you're going to be. You are one, either good, bad or indifferent. You see, the Holy Spirit is the lawyer for the defense. Christ is on trial, and the Spirit calls you into the court of the world to give a testimony, and you're giving one, some kind of testimony...I don't know what kind, but some kind.

Every Christian is a witness, and you have the power to be a dramatic and effective witness if you're really walking in the Spirit. Incidentally, the word "witness" in the Greek is *martyrace*, from which we get our word...what...martyr. Do you know how we got that word? Originally it meant a witness. But so many Christians died giving testimony that it became synonymous with dying. A martyr started out just to mean somebody who gave his testimony, but Christianity gave that word its definition. So many of them were slaughtered for their testimony.

You are a witness...my *martyrace*...my martyrs...witnesses unto me...my martyrs...you're my witnesses. Hey, the world is the judge, the lawyer for the defense is the Holy Spirit, and you and I are called into the court to give testimony, and we're giving some kind of testimony. I wonder what kind you're giving? I hope it supports the case for Jesus Christ.

So the Lord has given us a lot of things...proper message, manifestation, might, mystery, mission, and lastly, the proper motivation. If you're like I am, you need to be motivated. I mean there's just something about motivation. Whenever I think of motivation, I think of the time when I was a little kid, and I was watching an "Our Gang" comedy movie. And they had a little cart with a goat, and the goat wouldn't cooperate and pull the cart. They spent all day getting the thing built and hooked up, and the goat wouldn't go. So one little kid...the kid with the kinky hair and the little white things tied on it...what was his name? Buckwheat. He says...

[Laughter]

He says, "Look"...you know he's got this brainy idea, and he gets a big long pole, and he hangs a carrot about a foot from the goat's nose...that's motivation. The goat goes all around town all day trying to get the carrots.

[Laughter]

Well, motivation is something that makes you do something...that's all. And we are creatures subject to motivation. We work that way...we operate that way. That's the way we're approached in almost everything we do.

The television bombards us with motivation. I was talking to an advertising gal the other day, and she told me that the design of all advertising is to create dissatisfaction, and that is right. They want to make you dissatisfied. Your breath is inadequate, you need a different mouthwash, toothpaste, deodorant, shoe polish, whatever it is, a different car. Your old car doesn't make it...it doesn't stay up with the style, with the times. And always motivating.

I used to see the cigarette ads, you know, they were unbelievable. They don't have them anymore, but you see them on billboards, you know, beautiful people running through the meadow, and the sun is shining, and there's a bunch of leaves and a piece of paper hanging out of their mouth.

[Laughter]

And this is supposed to be life, you know. We used to say, "Who likes to lean down to kiss a girl and smell a Camel?"

[Laughter]

But anyway, this kind of...*(Laughter)*...this kind of thing goes on all the time because God has designed us to respond to motivating factors. God has designed us to respond to stimulus that is like that, and we do respond to that. Billboards, magazines, newspapers, and everything bombs us to motivate us.

The Lord knew that, and so He wanted to motivate us...look at verse 9. "And when He had spoken these things, while they beheld, He was taken up in a cloud and receded from them out of their sight." Christ just took off...just ascended into Heaven.

And of course, it says in verse 10, "And while they looked steadfastly"...it means while they had their eyes gazing or glued on him..."as He went up, two men stood by them, one going up and two are coming down...angels." It's getting very interesting up there. And then the angels had the audacity to ask the question, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into Heaven?" "Look at the traffic...where else would we be looking?"

[Laughter]

Well, what is exciting about this is, it says that the angels said, "Ye men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing longingly, as if you're losing Jesus?" Listen..."this same Jesus"...I love that..."this same Jesus who is taken up from you into Heaven shall" what? "So come in like manner as you have seen Him go into Heaven."

People, let me ask you this: What is our motivation to serve Christ? What's He using here as our motivation? Jesus is what? Coming back. And if we're going to do anything, we're going to need to do it now!

I preached on 2 Corinthians 5:9 one time at a conference. "We labor that, whether present or absent, we might be accepted of Him, for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ." Then verse 11 says, "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men." Jesus is coming. And He's not only coming to reward the saints, but judge the ungodly. And I don't know how much time we have. I was preaching away on this subject, and I said, "I don't know how much time we have, but I know that I ought to be motivated to minister for Christ. I ought to be motivated to finish the work that He's given me to do in the time that He's given me to do it before He gets here. And I don't know how much time I have. But my motivation is that some day, Christ will split the heavens with His coming, and I'm looking to that day. And when He comes, He says, 'Behold, I come quickly. My reward is with Me to give to every man according as his work shall be.' And He's not only coming to reward me, but He's coming to begin judgment in the world. Whatever I'm going to do, I got to do it now." And I was preaching away.

And after I was done, this gal came up to me...it was like the first day of a six-day conference...and

she says, "I've got to go home." I said, "You have to go home? Why?" And she had tears running down her cheeks. She said, "I've got to go home. My mother doesn't know Christ." I said, "She doesn't?" She says, "No." She says...I'll never forget this...she said, "Do you think I have time to get there before He comes?" I said, "I don't know, but you better hurry."

[Laughter]

And you know, she packed up her bag, and somebody took her down to the airport, and she was gone. Now Jesus didn't come, but I know one mother that saw the love of a daughter in the presentation of the Gospel. Some day in Heaven, I hope I'll meet that mother...I don't even know who she is. That's the kind of thing I'm talking about.

Jesus is coming. And the fact that He's coming moves me because I don't know how much time. And I want Him to come and say, "MacArthur, your love was genuine...I can see it by the fruit in your life, and I want you to know that. You loved Me not just in word and tongue, but you loved me in what? Deed and truth...that's evidence.

You know, we can finish the work that Jesus gives us to finish of His unfinished work...we can. We have everything...all the things we need...the right message, the right manifestation...the living Christ, the right power...the Holy Spirit, the right mystery...we don't know when He's coming, so we work all the time occupying until He gets here...the right mission, we're witnesses, and the right motive. He is coming to reward us who are faithful.

If I could come to one thing at the end of my life, I would rather come to this point than any point...to be able to lay down in death and say, "Lord, I am ready to die because I have finished my course." Wouldn't that be exciting?

You know, my dear grandfather who died in 1950 when I was a little boy...I remember this...he was lying on his bed, dying of cancer. He was a preacher, a Godly man. And he said to my dad, "Jack"...and of course, I was a little guy in the hall, you know, just looking in...He said, "Jack, if I could only preach one more sermon...just one more, Jack. There's so much in my heart that is yet to say. Just one more sermon." He never did...never got to preach it. My dad published a sermon that he never preached, and so in a way he did.

I thought to myself, "I wonder what it'll be when I get to that point?" Whether I'll be able to say, "Lord, look, I'm finished." You say, "Boy, that's really...you're really whistling in the cemetery."

[Laughter]

"What makes you think you're going to finish your work?" Well, I just have this tremendous inspiration that comes to my heart from my friend, the Apostle Paul, and I want you to hear what he said. 2 Timothy 4:6..."For I am now ready to be offered. Lord, I can die now. I'm ready to go. Please take me home. The time of my departure is at hand. It hasn't been easy. I have fought a good fight. I have" what? "Finished the course. I have kept the faith, henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness." Paul says, "Lord, I can die now; I'm done." Boy, wouldn't that be fantastic?

Listen, I can believe that a Christian can finish the work that Christ gives him to do. I don't think the

Lord wants to frustrate us. But in order to do it, you've got to take advantage of all of the ingredients that are given to you, see, and maximize your ministry.

Colossians 4:17..."Take heed to the ministry which you've received, and the Lord that you fulfill it." The only way to fulfill it is to maximize the ingredients that are given to you. Beloved, we have everything...everything we need. The only missing thing is the commitment to use those things for His glory.

Let's pray. It's been good, Father, tonight, to share. Our hearts have been encouraged, challenged, and strengthened, and our minds enlightened again with Your truth. We thank You for the reality of the Holy Spirit. We thank You for what the Holy Spirit is able to do in us to finish the work that Jesus began. Make us ever faithful. Make us ever responsive to the leading of the Holy Spirit, to take our lives and ministries the very way which Christ would have them go. And Father, we do look to the day when Jesus comes, that we might hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of thy Lord." We pray in His blessed name, Amen.

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