

ACTS 1:8

DO YOU HAVE A TITLE? OR A TESTIMONY?

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”¹

The disciples were just like us—they wanted power, especially power over other disciples. They were convinced that if only they had position in the Kingdom, they could accomplish great things, at least for themselves. On one occasion, James and John pushed for position. This is the account found in the Word of God. “James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to [Jesus] and said to him, ‘Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.’ And he said to them, ‘What do you want me to do for you?’ And they said to him, ‘Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory’” [MARK 10:35-37].

The boys even got their mama to plead their case on one occasion. We read, “The mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to him with her sons, and kneeling before him she asked him for something. And he said to her, ‘What do you want?’ She said to him, ‘Say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom’” [MATTHEW 20:20-21]. She didn’t want much, just for her sons to be Number One and Number Two in the Kingdom of God! We also read, “When the ten heard it, they were indignant at the two brothers” [MATTHEW 20:24], but their indignation appears to have arisen primarily because they were lacking the courage to make the same request.

Like contemporary church goers, the disciples jockeyed for position and for power in the Kingdom of God. James and John weren’t alone in their ambition. On another occasion when Jesus had spoken of the inability of wealth to secure one’s position in Heaven, the disciples were astounded. The Word of God informs us, “When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, ‘Who then can be saved?’ But Jesus looked at them and said, ‘With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible’” [MATTHEW 19:25, 26].

The disciples were obviously surprised by what Jesus was teaching. Peter, speaking for all the disciples asked, “See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have” [MATTHEW 19:27]? His concern was whether they would be recognised!

Jesus recognised unholy ambition for power clinging to His disciples like the stench of death. Thus, as He was about to leave them, He informed them, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you” [ACTS 1:8]. This power will not be military or economic or political. They would not have titles or office. “You will be My witnesses.” They would have a testimony. Testimonies are more important than titles. A title is a rank, office or an attainment bestowed by this world; and these titles and offices may be canceled by the world.

Testimonies are more important than titles. Pharaoh had a title; but Moses had a testimony. Jezebel had a title; but Elijah had a testimony. Nebuchadnezzar had a title; but Daniel had a testimony. Herod had a title; but John the Baptist had a testimony. Agrippa had a title; but Paul had a testimony. Pilate had a title; but Jesus had a testimony—and He had the title that He is the Son of the Living God.²

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² The first citation of this concept that I have found was from Dr. Sandy F. Ray, **Journeying Through a Jungle** (Baptist Sunday School Board, Nashville, TN 1979) 80-81

Some time ago, I heard a preacher ask the question, “Do you have a title or a testimony?” The question gave me pause, causing me to reflect on what is esteemed by us as believers. We Christians are too often caught up in the follies of this life, exchanging the eternal for the temporal. An old saint of bygone years warned against sacrificing the permanent on the altar of the immediate.³ We make choices on the basis of what we imagine we want in the next twenty years, in the next ten years or even in the coming year. When we do this, we have lost sight of eternity. Consequently, we are often guilty of making a fool’s choice exchanging eternity for immediate pleasure. We forget that Moses “chose to suffer with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasure of sin” [**HEBREWS 11:25 CSB**].

If all you have is a title, you will be grieved at your death because you will leave all behind. If you have a testimony, you will not fear death because at that moment of transition, real life will begin. At issue is where your life has been invested. If your investment is in temporal matters, all must be surrendered at death. If your investment is in eternal matters, you are assured of eternal rewards. This is what Jesus taught us when He said, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” [**MATTHEW 6:19-21**].

When you were born, you cried and everyone around you laughed. One day you are going to die; when you have died, people will dig a hole, put your body in the ground and throw dirt on your face. After your funeral, everyone will come back to the church to eat sandwiches and drink coffee or tea. Everyone will know whether you had a testimony or not. If you have lost your testimony, everyone will laugh, and you will cry. But, if you have kept your testimony—whether you have a title or not—on that day, everyone will cry, and you will laugh.

We are each moving inexorably toward a date with death. How tragic that some who hear my words will discover the dreadful reality of Jesus’ words spoken as He described a rich man who had died. Jesus said, “In Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes” [**LUKE 16:23**]. My prayer is that this description will not be applicable to any of you when God calls you home. My prayer is that you, like Lazarus, when you have died, will be “carried by the angels” to God’s side [see **LUKE 16:22**]. Too quickly people will learn that titles are rendered meaningless before the Great Assize presided over by the Living God. Before that Great White Throne, those arrayed will be known only as “the dead” [see **REVELATION 20:12, 13**]. The titles which meant so much on earth will be meaningless for Christians standing before the Judgement Seat of Christ. There, saved individuals will be gathered to receive the commendation of the Risen Saviour. Before Him, when He is seated on that throne, those who will stand before Him on that day shall be called “The Holy People” and “The Redeemed of the LORD” [see **ISAIAH 62:12**]. Then, their testimony will be eternal; all earthly titles will have been rendered meaningless, inconsequential.

AN AMBITION FOR POWER — It is hard, perhaps impossible, that we shouldn’t be infected with the attitudes that mark this dying world. We want to be somebody; we want to be powerful. We want to be E. F. Hutton; we want it to be known that when we speak, everyone listens. It is important for us to “feel good about ourselves,” to believe that our opinion counts. However, it is essential that we remember that what we think is really not all that important. What is important is knowing the will of God and doing what pleases Him. In the realm of the spiritual, this means that we must know our limitations and rest in the Master’s direction for each life.

³ Dr. Bob Jones, Sr. was noted as frequently making this admonition.

It is as though Jesus read the mind of these disciples when He began speaking with them. When He said, “But you will receive power,” He was responding to their query. Let’s move back somewhat so we can understand what was going on, especially understanding their questions. The Book of Acts is the second part of a history of Jesus’ ministry. In this second part, Doctor Luke focused on how that ministry was extended through the Apostles. So, Luke details all that his first book, which we know as the Gospel of Luke, dealt with. “In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God” [ACTS 1:1-3].

With this second book, Luke will continue the account of all that was taking place, focusing on the advance of the Kingdom of God through the Apostles. He informs us why the disciples didn’t immediately leave Jerusalem, when he writes, “While staying with them [Jesus] ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, ‘you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now’” [ACTS 1:4, 5].

They were met at a mountain in Galilee. This was at the Master’s specific direction. After Jesus had risen from the tomb, the angel directed the women who came to the tomb, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you” [MATTHEW 28:5-7].

The Eleven were obedient to Jesus’ command, for we read, “The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them” [MATTHEW 28:16]. Now, they are gathered atop this particular mount. The disciples are beginning to be somewhat excited because the Master conquered death. Their fear behind them, for the moment. They are beginning to be hopeful that He will bring in the Kingdom of Heaven. It is almost as if they were ready to go back to jockeying for position within that divine Kingdom. So, they asked Him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel” [ACTS 1:6]?

Take note of the first part of Jesus’ response to their query. They knew that Messiah would restore the Kingdom to Israel. They believed that Jesus was the Messiah, God’s Anointed One, so they asked, wondering whether they would be accorded the power they deserved! These men had once before argued about their position in the Kingdom. One incident is recorded in Luke’s first book. “A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. And he said to them, ‘The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves. For who is the greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at table? But I am among you as the one who serves.

“You are those who have stayed with me in my trials, and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel” [LUKE 22:24-30].

Jesus’ response to that query must surely have given them hope that they would know power—power such as the world gives. They would eat and drink at His table in the Kingdom; and they had heard Him say that they would “sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” They understood that they would have power—real power, they would be influence brokers.

However, as the Master responded to their eager question, He dashed their immediate anticipation of obtaining power over others or even power over their fellows. Jesus said, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority” [ACTS 1:7]. It is as if the Master said, “That’s none of your business.” This was quite a gentle rebuke, but a rebuke nonetheless, revealing even to their obtuse minds that their conception of power, of influence and stature in the eyes of the world, was horribly distorted by the standards of Heaven. The role they would play in advancing the Kingdom of the Saviour would not bring their accolades and adulation from the world—quite the opposite!

And yet, there was this promise, “But, you will receive power” [ACTS 1:8a]. You are not going to have stature in the eyes of the world, *but you will receive power*. You will not be a king maker, *but you will receive power*. You are not going to have people hanging onto your every word and fawning over you, *but you will receive power*. You are not going to be great in the eyes of this world, *but you will receive power*. Church, did you hear what the Master said? Stop dreaming of ruling over the church—it won’t happen. Nevertheless, *you will receive power!*

I’ve told of the power broker in one church that asserted, “I’m the chairman of this church. What I want, I get. What I don’t want ain’t gonna’ happen.” He was somewhat more blatant than some, but it does seem that every congregation have people who do not understand that God is not looking for power brokers—God is seeking out men and women with spiritual power. Consequently, that church is no longer in existence. God will not long tolerate a church that fails to confront such power brokers. God said to that congregation, as He said to the Church at Thyatira, “I gave her time to repent, but she refuse[d] to repent” [REVELATION 2:21]. There was nothing left but to give that church over to her own devices, and her eventual death.

I must caution the people of God to be cautious; watch out that none of us stumble, falling into the trap of seeking power over others. Be especially careful to avoid seeking power in the church. I understand that each of us does want to think that our word carries weight, that our ideas are flawless and that others must accept our superior insight, that we can impose our will on fellow church members. It is easy to be offended because we didn’t get the respect we thought we deserved. However, we must guard ourselves.

Hear the Word of the Lord. “By the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness” [ROMANS 12:3-8]. Humbly invest yourself in others so that God is glorified.

“Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight” [ROMANS 12:16].

The Apostle admonishes Christians, “We who are strong ought to be patient with the weaknesses of those who are not strong and must stop pleasing ourselves” [ROMANS 15:1⁴].

Again, we read, “Accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God” [ROMANS 15:7⁵].

⁴ International Standard Version (ISV Foundation, Yorba Linda, CA 2011)

⁵ New American Standard Bible, 1995 Edition: Paragraph Version (The Lockman Foundation, La Habra, CA 1995)

A NEW FORM OF POWER — “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” [ACTS 1:8]. Here is a truth that is not often realised among the people of God—we are spiritual beings. We fall into a trap of thinking of ourselves as physical beings who happen to have a spiritual dimension. Twice-born people know that they have a new spirit. However, God’s Word teaches that we are spiritual beings who have a body housing our spirit!

The spirit is dead because we are separated from God who is life. This is because we were born in sin. We are tripartite beings—we are a living soul; we have a body; and we have a spirit that must return to God. We were born in sin—our spirit was dead; our soul was condemned; the body was under sentence of death. When one is saved, God redeems the soul, gives us a new spirit and promises the redemption of the body in due time. God has given us His Spirit as the guarantee that He will fulfil all that He has promised. Accordingly, we are spiritual beings who happen to possess a body. For a Christian, the body must die, but the soul has been saved and the spirit awaits the resurrection when God will give it a new body.

Here is the point of this excursus—it is God’s Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, that now lives within the believer. The power that was promised to these first believers, and the power that we now have resident within us as Christians, is that spiritual power reflecting the presence of God’s Holy Spirit. Because we are infected to an astonishing degree with the concepts of this dying world, we often look for evidence of power that fails to reflect this spiritual power.

Human nature wants to astonish those who witness us in the conduct of our ministries. Simon, known as “the Great,” witnessed the Apostles conducting their ministry in Samaria. According to the divine text, Simon saw the signs and also the great miracles as people believed. He wanted power such as that, and he attempted to buy it. He had amazed people with magic, and he saw the power of the Holy Spirit as another means to amaze people; it would inflate his self-esteem. His effort brought a damning rebuke from Peter. “May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity” [ACTS 8:20-23]. Much of the thinking concerning power among contemporary Christians mirrors the thinking of Simon.

What, then, is this power that we have? What should the Christian anticipate as the Spirit of God works in that individual’s life? Jesus said that when the Holy Spirit had come, these disciples would be His *witnesses*! They would begin to speak boldly in His Name in Jerusalem, then in Samaria and even to the farthest reaches of the earth! The surest evidence that the power of God rests on you is that you have a testimony, *you have a witness*. And that testimony will be delivered in power—what you say will have an impact on those who hear you.

Let me dig down here to explore what this can mean in each life. Mother, do your children hear your testimony of God’s grace at work in your life? Or do they hear vague wishes? Are they unaware of your concern for their eternal soul? Do your children know that you love them enough to jeopardise your relationship in order to speak the truth in love?

What about you, fathers? Do your children hear you speak of your deep concern for their eternal welfare? Do they know that though you love them, your love is deep enough to speak the truth even though it may risk their anger? Or is all they hear are whiny, vacuous wishes? Worse still, do your children hear silence which they interpret to mean acceptance of their deadly choices? Are your children so unaware of your concern for their spiritual welfare that they imagine you actually approve of their rejection of the Saviour?

Do those with whom you work know you are a Christian? I'm not asking if you use work time to testify, but I wonder if our speech and our manner of life make it evident that God is working in our life! Do your neighbours know that you are a follower of the Christ? The Spirit testifying through you is real evidence of the reliability of Jesus' words. The Master promised disciples, "When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness" [**JOHN 15:26, 27a**].

Listen to Peter, as he admonishes us who have believed. "Who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect" [**1 PETER 3:13-15**]. You must always be prepared to make a defence of your Faith. Speak with gentleness, but speak!

Do strangers actually inquire about the Faith? I vividly recall the first time this happened to me. One afternoon as I waited for a trolley in San Francisco, I became aware of someone standing close to me. The young man was looking rather intently at me. When I became aware of him, I smiled and greeted him. "Excuse me," he began timidly, "but are you a Christian? I couldn't help but notice that you look like a Christian."

I was dressed casually since I was on my way to the laboratory. I didn't dress any differently from other post-doctoral fellows at the medical school. I looked much as I do today, except I carried considerably less weight and my hair was a bit darker in those days. Nevertheless, there was nothing particularly distinguishing about me. I replied to his query, "Yes, I am a follower of the Christ. Why do you ask?"

"You looked like a Christian, and I wondered what was different about you," he said. His question opened a door to speak about Christ. I opened my New Testament and quickly walked him down the Roman's Road. By the time the bus arrived, he had prayed, asking that Christ would forgive his sin and receive him into the eternal Kingdom. As we parted that day, I marvelled at the prescience of Peter's words. Be prepared, you never know when someone will ask about the hope that is in you. I knew this to be the work of God's Spirit opening this door.

Assuredly, the power of God's Spirit will be seen in your witness. I know that some who listen wonder what they will say. You imagine that you are not a biblical scholar. You question whether you are able to convince anyone with your words. You have a promise that addresses this concern. Jesus promised, "The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" [**JOHN 14:26**]. The Spirit of God, living in you, will *teach you and bring to your remembrance* all that is necessary for your testimony to be powerful.

If somehow that is not enough to convince you that God's Spirit will be working in you as you deliver your testimony, then what about this promise delivered by Jesus? "When they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit" [**MARK 13:11**]. I understand that you may dissent because you are not anticipating being brought to trial as a Christian. However, speaking to a lost family member, telling a lost neighbour about Christ the Lord or pointing a colleague toward the Faith, you are being observed. When members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen opposed Stephen as he spoke, we read, "They could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking" [**ACTS 6:10**]. No more can those who stand opposed to grace resist your testimony when you speak as the Spirit prompts you.

Jesus also promised His disciples, “It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you” [JOHN 16:7-14].

God’s Holy Spirit, working in us as Christians, will convict sinners and glorify the Son of God. We are prone to forget that it is impossible to convict anyone in our own wisdom. However, as the Spirit of the Living God speaks through the child of God, the words that are spoken do *convict sinners*. We do not always immediately see the conviction, but we may be confident that God is working in us to accomplish His will. Those who are convicted may react strongly, openly rejecting what we have said, but they cannot escape the conviction of the Spirit. Those who hear us may appear enraged, but God will work in their heart nevertheless. We worry that our witness has no power, but you do not know what is happening in the heart of those who hear us speak. God’s Spirit convicts whom He wills, and He does so through the words we speak as we are impelled by Him.

I recall an incident that occurred many years ago in a church. A young woman attended the services of the congregation, but she had never openly confessed her faith in Christ as Lord. One Sunday, at the conclusion of the morning services, I spoke with her as I had on other occasions, asking why she put off openly confessing her faith in the Saviour. She exploded. Her anger was palpable. “You won’t ever be satisfied until you drive me away from this church,” she raged. “Well, you won’t ever see me again. I’m finished coming to this church.” With that final statement, she stormed off.

All afternoon I was miserable. How could I have been so clumsy, so unthinking. I had sought her welfare and God’s glory, and all I had succeeded in doing was driving her away. Throughout the afternoon, I prayed, asking God to forgive my stumbling efforts and asking Him to somehow make things right.

Doctor Higgs, our pastor, baptised most Sunday evenings at 6:30. Our family tried to be present to observe those standing for Christ in this initial ordinance. We were somewhat delayed this particular evening, no doubt due to the need to ready children and perhaps because I felt so miserable. We arrived just in time to see that young woman enter the baptistery and to hear her testimony of salvation. Among the things she said as she confessed her faith was a statement that caused me to marvel at God’s grace.

She spoke of her confidence that Christ had forgiven her and stated that she realised her need to openly confess Him as Master over life. She couldn’t see out into the darkened auditorium as she spoke these next statements. “I was pushed into taking this step by one man, Mike Stark. He wouldn’t stop until I had surrendered to Christ. He cared enough to confront me with my need even when I was angry because he pointed out my sin.”

It wasn’t me; it was the Holy Spirit of God at work through my stumbling words. My desire was to see this young woman, and as many as possible, place faith in the Saviour. I know I was inarticulate, perhaps even rambling, but God had been at work. It was less a matter of what was said than it was of the One who prompted what was said. And so it is for you as you live out your testimony.

2 CORINTHIANS 1:8-24
DO YOU HAVE A TITLE OR A TESTIMONY?

Just as it is impossible to convict sinners of their sinful condition or of the danger of judgement, so it is impossible to *glorify Christ* without the presence of the Spirit of God. The Spirit of Christ working in the life of the redeemed saint of God will always glorify Christ. He will not glorify man or glorify Himself—always and ever He will glorify the Son. Sing as loudly as you wish; shout and lift your hands ever so high—these are not bad things; however, if the Spirit of God is not present, you will not have worshipped. If your actions are not motivated by Him, you are only making noise or making a show.

The Apostle reviewed the worship of the saints in Rome as he wrote, “May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

“Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God’s truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written,

‘Therefore, I will praise you among the Gentiles,
and sing to your name.’

“And again it is said,

‘Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.’

“And again,

‘Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles,
and let all the peoples extol him.’

“And again Isaiah says,

‘The root of Jesse will come,
even he who arises to rule the Gentiles;
in him will the Gentiles hope.’

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope” [ROMANS 15:5-13].

As the Spirit of God works in each of us to bring us collectively into harmony, we will experience joy and peace in our service. It will be the power of the Holy Spirit that causes us to abound in hope. The church will have a testimony among outsiders that, though they do not agree with us on all things, Christ is with us. Isn’t it about time that the assembly had a testimony? Isn’t it about time that outsiders are drawn to seek out what is happening here? Isn’t it about time that when outsiders witness the testimony of God’s presence they will be “convicted by all [and] called to account by all?” Isn’t it about time that as outsiders see the testimony of God’s presence among us, “the secrets of [their] heart [will be] disclosed?” Isn’t it about time that we actually witnessed outsiders “falling on [their] face, ... worship[ping] God [even as they] declare that God is really among [us]” [see 1 CORINTHIANS 14:24, 25]? Church? Isn’t it time that we had a testimony rather than a title.

A TESTIMONY OF POWER — The disciples heard the Master’s promise, a promise contingent upon their obedience. They didn’t waste any time after He had ascended into the heavens. Shaken from their awed state by heavenly emissaries who assured them that this same Jesus would come again in the identical manner they had seen Him go. After they had returned, they gathered in an upper room where they “were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers” [ACTS 1:14]. Seize this truth—they were united in heart, united in purpose, united in anticipation; thus united, they were devoting themselves to prayer.

I know a few things about God’s Spirit. I know that “God is not a God of confusion but of peace” [1 CORINTHIANS 14:33a]. That tells me that God’s Spirit seeks unity among His people. I know that God wants His people to be “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” [EPHESIANS 4:3]. I know that God’s ultimate aim for His people is that “we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes” [EPHESIANS 4:13, 14]. I know that God’s will for each assembly is that we will “have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind” [1 PETER 3:8]. *United in heart, united in purpose and united in anticipation*, a church will prove to be powerful. Such a congregation will have a testimony and not merely bear a title.

We live in a day when too many of the churches of Zion fit the description of the Church of Sardis: “You have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead” [REVELATION 3:1]. Dead churches arise when assemblies tolerate a clique or an elite to run the church. Dead churches arise when assemblies tolerate people among their ranks who insist on getting their own way. Churches that are alive can be messy places to worship. There will be a spectrum of worshippers—some having been in the Faith for many years, others being new to the Faith, some having advanced far toward the goal of maturity in Christ, others quite immature at times. Though a church may be messy, it can be united. Neat, problem-free churches often have a title within the community; but messy churches can have a testimony. If we are reaching for something, let it be the testimony that God is among us, that the Spirit is at work in our midst.

Do you recall John’s testimony? “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”

“This is he who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not by the water only but by the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree. If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that he has borne concerning his Son. Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son. And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life” [1 JOHN 5:1-12].

2 CORINTHIANS 1:8-24

DO YOU HAVE A TITLE OR A TESTIMONY?

“This is the testimony!” If you are a Christian, you have a testimony! Let that testimony define your life and your service before the Master, Jesus the Son of God. Here is what is important for us who are Christians to remember—God seeks people who are committed to advancing His Kingdom. Christ the Risen Saviour seeks men and women who are willing not only to say that He lives, but who conduct their lives as if He lives and reigns over their lives. The Spirit of God works in power in the midst of that congregation that seeks God’s glory above their own reputation. Let us be that congregation. Let each of us determine before the Lord that we will be such individuals.

I’ve spoken to Christians throughout this message; I am unapologetic in urging each one who knows the Lord as Master over life to make certain you have a testimony. Titles will not suffice to honour the Risen Saviour. Heaven knows I’m a Baptist; but I am absolutely certain there will be no Baptists praising God around the Emerald Throne. In Heaven, there will be only redeemed saints of the Living God. We are saved to make Christ central to life and worship. We are not saved to promote a denomination or a doctrine; we are saved to the glory of Christ the Lord. Let this be the testimony we bear—that Jesus Christ is Master over life.

However, it may be that I have spoken this day to someone who stands outside of this holy Faith. I plead with you to ensure that you have a testimony of salvation by faith in the Living Son of God. The Word urges each one, “If you agree with God that Jesus is Master over your life, believing in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be set free. It is with the heart that one believes and is made right with the Father and through openly agreeing with God that Jesus is Lord and is set free.”⁶ This promise which was penned by the Apostle Paul concludes by citing the words of the Prophet Joel, “Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord will be saved” [**ROMANS 10:13**]. Call on Him, while you can. Amen.

⁶ Loose translation of **ROMANS 10:9, 10**.