

## Jesus Prepares His Witnesses

‡ Of His Resurrection (vv.1-8)

‡ Encouraged by His Ascension (vv.8-11)

‡ Empowered by Pentecost (vv.8,12-14)

In the name of Jesus, our crucified and risen Lord of the Church, dearly redeemed:

A TV documentary (ca. 1997) entitled “*Weapons of the Spirit*” had Jewish producer wondering about something that happened during WWII. Several Protestant villages in northern France kept rescuing Jewish children and raising them as their own in spite of danger for themselves and their families by vicious Nazi invaders. The villages could not communicate with each other because Hitler’s SS were always watching. For Jewish strangers, Gentile adults and children risked everything to rescue them from the Holocaust. And they weren’t proselytizing because after the war only a few of the Jewish children converted to Christianity. The whole documentary asked, “Why?” Could the answer be as simple as our text, as profound as our Lord’s encouragement for us today? **Jesus Prepares His Witnesses** – first...

‡ Of His Resurrection (vv.1-8)

Just for fun read the last chapter of Luke and the first chapter of Acts back-to-back. You’ll be impressed with the writing skill of Dr. Luke, a Gentile convert to the Jewish Messiah. But you can be even more impressed how the Holy Spirit inspired Luke to write with such conviction in his Gospel account and his second book called Acts. Galilean fishermen, a tax collector, a religious/political zealot, and other uneducated men and women took the message of Christ-crucified to the world? Where would ordinary people get such extraordinary faith except from Jesus’ **Resurrection**?

We’ve watched as **Jesus Prepares His Witnesses** during His three years of ministry on earth. But at His death and resurrection Jesus fired up all the circuits to enable something totally beyond human capacity. You know how the disciples doubted. In Luke 24, we find two disciples trudging to Emmaus thinking Jesus is dead. But Jesus opened their minds to the Holy Scriptures and revealed Himself by breaking bread. Convinced of **His resurrection**, they ran all the way back to Jerusalem. Jesus gave His disciples “*many convincing proofs that he was alive...over a period of forty days [while He] spoke about the kingdom of God.*” Christianity is the only religion with an empty tomb. God uses the same power that raised Jesus from the dead to make our hearts alive to be eager and willing **witnesses**.

Running away from the city of Jerusalem would have been perfectly natural. That’s where Jesus was crucified by the Jewish authorities. Instead, Jesus commanded them, “*Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.*”

Some theologians put their own opinion on those words instead of letting Scripture interpret Scripture. They want to talk about “Spirit baptism” as if it’s something greater than “water baptism” even though the Holy Spirit says through Paul there is “*one Lord, one faith, one baptism...*” (Ephesians 4:5 NIV84) A closer look at the Greek original shows our English translations are a little confusing when they say, “John baptized *with* water” and, “You will be baptized *with* the Holy Spirit.” More literally we could translate: “John on the one hand baptized with water, but you on the other hand in the sphere of the Spirit will be baptized with holiness / the Holy One in not too many days.” The picture is of the disciples getting flooded by the Holy Spirit as happened at Pentecost only ten days later.

But first the disciples had a question. You know this has been called, “The dumbest question in the Bible.” Unfortunately, Christians are still asking it and all of us get fooled by it. Here it is – ready?

**“Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”** Don’t we all feel sad to see empty seats in worship? Don’t we wish more people would come and study the Bible with us? We all want Christ’s victorious rule to be seen by everyone. Even the psalmists prayed for vindication from God. (Psalm 26, 119, etc.) But Jesus says the timing is not our responsibility. Our job is to witness Christ’s **resurrection** to the ends of the earth. And never has there been a time in history when we could witness with the ease of the Internet and Skype. We’re witnessing with sermons through our New Life website and web classes for China Partners. Jesus is now using us as He **Prepares His Witnesses...**

### † **Encouraged by His Ascension (vv.8-11)**

They had never seen anyone fly. We’ve all watched jet planes and helicopters or sometimes a hot air balloon. But if I were talking to you and just started to go up and up – then disappeared in a cloud, you might stand gawking too. Were the angels chuckling a little? Giving those backwoods boys from a Galilee “the needle” when they said this? **“Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”** I wish it weren’t true, but I can totally relate. We all ask misguided questions and get distracted by minor miracles. God wants us busy working major miracles with His Word.

Our hope for Christ’s return on Judgment Day picks us up and keeps us going. It raises our spirits even when our body is hurting and the doctors can’t tell why. When everything else fails, this hope encourages and sustains us: Christ will come again. He came the first time to suffer and die. He came to live and work among miserable disciples like us who selfishly compete for the best position or just walk away as if we don’t care about God and His house. The first coming of Christ was hard, to suffer and die on the cross for all our sins. But next time Christ Jesus will come in total victory to condemn the nonbelievers and to take His loved ones home to heaven. He will come like a pent up flood. With all the excitement of a bridegroom Christ will take His bride the Church home at last. Do you think Jesus will hold off one more minute than necessary? Is there any way He would let the suffering continue another second except for one more person to come repent and believe? God wants everyone to enjoy His hard won rescue from hell. Be **Encouraged by His Ascension** and you will be prepared all the more...

### † **Empowered by Pentecost (vv.8,12-14)**

Summertime is devoted to Pentecost. This is the 4<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST. During the school year we see Jesus’ life *for* us. Now all through the summer we are looking at Jesus’ life *in* us – the way we shine as His **Witnesses** in the world. It’s what the Twelve, minus Judas, were doing as they waited in an upper room of Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit tells us, **“They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.”** No one could tear them apart because Jesus was preparing **His Witnesses** to be **Empowered by Pentecost**.

It’s not always so pretty. Think of Stephen witnessing with his blood. The Jewish religious leaders did not want to hear how they had crucified their own Messiah. So they silenced Stephen under a pile of rocks. All the disciples were sent as apostles into an angry world of sin-loving unbelievers who murdered all the apostles but John. Have we had it too easy? Is that why God’s house gets neglected while we’re so busy with our own? Does the habit of not going to church overwhelm us because we’ve never felt the overwhelming hatred from enemies of the cross? **“Joined together constantly in prayer”** is the way we find Christians throughout the world wherever they suffer for their faith. God’s Word and sacraments keep them **Empowered by Pentecost** to speak up for Christ and worshipping together.

And that’s how the writer of that documentary answered his own question without knowing it. His title, *Weapons of the Spirit*, explains why all those Protestant villages had “one mind.” It wasn’t like the Borg in *Star Trek*. No, all those Protestant villages heard the Word of God and worshiped their Savior Jesus Christ. For His sake, they loved their neighbor in spite of all the risks. Are you prepared to love your neighbor enough to tell? Will you witness for Christ? God make it so! Engage! Amen.