

Session 3 - Witnesses

Following Jesus as a disciple means making disciples by declaring and demonstrating who Jesus is

In this last lesson we want to turn outward and consider our mission as Christians and as a church. In Acts 1:8 Jesus gives his people a commission, "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." Our study starts with that word "witnesses."

1. How do we become witnesses?

We're going to look at one example of how a man became a witness in Mark 5.

a) We need Jesus

Mark 5:1-5 - "They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes. And when Jesus had stepped out of the boat, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit. He lived among the tombs. And no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain, for he had often been bound with shackles and chains, but he wrenched the chains apart, and he broke the shackles in pieces. No one had the strength to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones."

As we talked about in the first lesson we all need Jesus. Perhaps we don't look exactly like this man but we are all enslaved in our sin, trapped under spiritual bondage, oppressed by the world. This man's demonic oppression was unique. But our enslavement was no less complete.

b) We encounter Jesus

"And when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and fell down before him," it says of this man in verse 6. At some point in each of our stories we encounter Jesus. Mark 4:35 says that, "On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, 'Let us go across to the other side.'" We learn in Mark 4:35 that Jesus actually came looking for this man.

c) We experience salvation

Jesus does save the man. In verses 8-13 we see that Jesus casts the unclean spirits of the man, freeing him from bondage and giving him salvation. This man's salvation was unique in terms of freedom from demonic bondage. But as we've seen earlier: Our sins were covered, our debts paid, our chains broken, our standing before God secured, our reconciliation complete, our adoption proclaimed.

2. What does it mean to be a witness?

Mark 5:18–20: “As he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed with demons begged him that he might be with him. And he did not permit him but said to him, “Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.” And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled.”

What do witnesses do?

a) They declare

Jesus tells the man to “tell your friends how much the Lord has done for you and how he has had mercy on you.” He says “tell your story.” We tell others about Jesus--who He is, what He’s done, and what it means for the world. And included in that is what Jesus has done in our own lives.

b) They demonstrate

“The herdsmen fled and told it in the city and in the country. And people came to see what it was that had happened. And they came to Jesus and saw the demon-possessed man, the one who had had the legion, sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, and they were afraid.” (Mark 5:14-15)

This man’s very life is a demonstration of his message. His life is different! In the same way our lives are different because of Jesus.

3. What do witnesses declare?

Again, witnesses must declare. Romans 10:14–15 says “How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!”

The word “gospel” is literally “good news.” And our best demonstrations of the gospel, without talking about Jesus, won’t save anyone. The gospel is a message that must be communicated in order to point people to saving faith in Jesus.

a) Witnesses declare who Jesus is

Witnesses begin by declaring who Jesus is: the son of God. He was fully God and fully man. We should strive to understand Jesus and be able to proclaim Him faithfully. But we also don’t want to. In John 4:29 a woman who experiences Jesus’ mercy goes and says “Come see a man who told me everything I ever did.”

b) Witnesses declare what Jesus has done

Witnesses declare what Jesus did for them. It's important then to be clear on the gospel. What is the gospel? It is that Christ died to save sinners like this.

1 Timothy 1:15–16: “The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.”

4. What do witnesses demonstrate?

Luke 19:5–10: “And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.” So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all grumbled, “He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.” And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.” And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

So when this notorious sinner encounters Jesus and is changed what he does demonstrates the reality of what has happened to him.

a) They demonstrate who Jesus is

Disciples of Jesus should imitate the character of God as displayed in Jesus. Zaccheus turns from greed to generosity, demonstrating the character of a generous God.

b) They demonstrate what Jesus has done

Disciples of Jesus should have lives that quickly demonstrate the effect of the gospel on their lives. Zacheus doesn't just give back what he took. That's fair. No he gives MORE than he took. That's a demonstration of God's grace. That's what Jesus has done for him!

5. Where do we witness?

The real answer is “everywhere.” But there's a pattern laid out in Acts 1:8-9, “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.” And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.”

OUR VISION

Based on these verses our prayerful vision statement as a church is:

We long to see gospel renewal in the city of El Paso, and through it, the world.

1. Why gospel renewal?

a) Because the gospel answers our greatest need.

There is a need deeper than healthcare and education and income and relationship status. We have a deep longing to know the God who created us and a deep need to be reconciled and restored to Him.

b) Because the gospel changes us.

Scripture says when we repent and believe the gospel we in a sense die to our old life and are given a new life. God sends his Spirit into our hearts to renew us from the inside out. 2 Corinthians 5:7 says “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away, behold, new things have come.” When we repent and believe we become something new. And with the power of the Spirit we are being transformed (2 Cor. 3:8) and that work is both being done by God in us, and something we are charged to participate in (Rom. 12:1-2).

c) Because the gospel changes everything.

The message of the gospel doesn’t just renew one part of our life. Often in America, we think of Christianity or religion as being a “part” of our life. But the gospel message creates a renewed heart and a renewed relationship with God that changes everything else about us.

We see in the New Testament some examples of how the gospel changes everything in our lives:

- The gospel renews marriage to be a place where husbands and wives serve one another first not demand to be served (Eph 5)
- The gospel renews families to be a place where parents are called to patience, not anger; and training, not indifference (Eph 6)
- The gospel renews work so that any service done even to an evil boss is done for the Lord (Col 3)
- The gospel renews our approach to conflict so we’re not trying to win we’re trying to walk out the peace we have with God (Rom 12)

If we want to see deep life-change and transformation in El Paso and our world we must long for gospel renewal

2. Why El Paso?

a) We have been sent to this city.

In Acts 1 Jesus first commissions them to go where they already are! He doesn't say start in Egypt or Rome, he tells them to start with their own city. In Acts 17:26 Scripture says that God appoints each person to live in a specific time and place. That means God sovereignly ordained they would be exactly those disciples for that time and that place. And that means you are here in El Paso, right here, right now, because God has sent you here. It's no accident. God has placed you here.

b) God desires gospel renewal in our city.

God has sent his church into the world with the gospel because He desires to see hearts renewed and he desires them to go to the ends of the earth. It's hard to get further from Jerusalem than El Paso, TX and yet the commission of Jesus includes our city. The Apostle Peter writes in 2 Peter 3:9 that the Lord "is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance." God desires to save! He desires that the gospel be proclaimed and that many come to repent and be renewed in Christ. That's true for our city as well.

c) There is a deep need for gospel renewal in our city.

There's a passage in Matthew 9:36-38 where Jesus looks out: "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

Jesus calls His people to view their city through His eyes. He calls us to see its needs and have our hearts be moved. We don't ignore the city, hate the city, exploit the city for what we can get out of it, we have compassion on it. We see people harassed and helpless because of the effects of sin and the brokenness of the world. And we say "We know what they need! They need a shepherd. They need Jesus!"

Our city:

- There are 680,000 people living in this city. We are the 22nd largest city in America.
- There are over 1 million people in the El Paso-Las Cruces area and surrounding towns, like Horizon. With Juarez and its area included, there are 2.5 million people here. We are the largest bi-national workforce in the Western Hemisphere.

As a church we're not just called to disciple-making in general, but disciple-making here. We're not just longing to see gospel renewal in general, but gospel renewal here. This is where God has sent us!

3. Why through El Paso to the world?

We are called to care about not just our corner of the ends of the earth but in a sense, all the whatever the “ends of the earth” are from us. In Revelation, we see that the Lord has gathered a choir of people from every tribe and tongue and nation (Rev 5:9) at the end of history. So we know He has a purpose to call people from every place. We must be globally-minded as a church.

We want to be a place that equips people and sends them many places. And this is the legacy of our church: We have sent leaders or people to Juarez, Phoenix, Vancouver, Frisco, Jacksonville, New Orleans, and the Philippines.

But here is what is unique about our city: If we reach our city we will reach across the U.S. and across the world. This area is El Paso Del Norte. In its history, it sprang up because it was a stopping point from one place to another. And for many, it is still a stopping point.

- We have 32,000 members of the military at Ft. Bliss TX, many of them on 3-year rotations there, and from here they go everywhere.
- We have tens of thousands of people who come through El Paso, TX and immigrate to other parts of the U.S. Many will be here for a time then move on.
- We have 25,000 students at UTEP along with many others from Texas Tech, Community College, and other training programs. Many of them will be trained here and then sent elsewhere.

So here is the unique opportunity we have: If we reach our city, if we proclaim the gospel faithfully and hearts are renewed, those people will be sent far beyond us to places you and I may never even go.

HOMEWORK // How can you be part of what He is doing in the world today?

This week take some time to go through the homework and consider what missional opportunities God has placed in your path.