

Bible Studies for Life for April 19: Jesus's followers: True witnesses or wishful thinkers?

April 9, 2009

When Jesus ascended to the Father, he left the disciples with the task of being witnesses. They had the instruction to go and tell the masses about what they had experienced by being with Jesus. However, before they could go out and present the gospel, Jesus instructed them to wait for the Holy Spirit to come upon them.

The Holy Spirit present in their lives would give them the direction and authority to speak the truth concerning all Jesus had said and taught. It is important for believers to understand their personal witness about Jesus is credible.

Commissioned by Jesus (Acts 1:4-8)

After Jesus' resurrection, he appeared "over a period of 40 days and spoke about the kingdom of God" (v. 3). He showed himself to his disciples and others proving to them he was alive. Before he returned to the Father, Jesus gave instruction on what they must do.

Jesus said, "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 by the Holy Spirit" (vv. 4-5). The coming of the Holy Spirit upon all the believers is important because it would be the power needed to fulfill the commission given by Jesus.

The commission given by Jesus is this "you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (v.

8).

In my role as the director of public relations for East Texas Baptist University, I have been given the authority to be the official spokesperson for the university. My authority comes from policy procedures approved by the board of trustees. Just like I have been given authority to speak on behalf of my employer, all believers have the authority to be a witness about the life of Jesus and the forgiveness of sin only he can provide. The authority to speak has come from having a personal relationship with Jesus.

The followers of Christ are to be his witnesses despite where they may be geographically. The news about his death and resurrection is for all people everywhere. The gospel is a universal message that must be delivered by those who have had a life changing experience with the risen Lord Jesus. A believer does not have the option of not being a witness for Christ.

Filled with the Spirit (Acts 2:1-4)

When believers are obedient to God's commands, extraordinary events occur. God had a purpose for Jesus' disciples to wait for the filling of the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem. The filling of the Holy Spirit occurred when Jerusalem was crowded with many travelers. What God did on that Day of Pentecost was part of his plan to jump start the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 1:8).

We learn from the Old Testament that 50 days after Passover, Pentecost was held. Pentecost, also called the Feast of Weeks, was a celebration to give thanks for the harvested crops. Jews of many nations traveled to Jerusalem for this thanksgiving time.

As Jerusalem was bustling with activity, the disciples were "all together in one place" and God made his presence known in a spectacular way as "suddenly a sound like a blowing of a violent wind" was heard (vv. 1-2).

After the blowing wind was heard “they saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them” (v. 3).

It is important to note that the “tongues” rested on each believer present. The filling of the Holy Spirit was for every believer. It was not just a group experience. All believers are to use their personal experience in telling others who Jesus is and what he has done.

“All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them” (v. 4). The filling of the Holy Spirit on that day allowed the believers to communicate the wonders of God in a way in which everyone understood in their own native language (vv. 7-11).

These travelers who witnessed this outpouring of the Holy Spirit went back to their native countries and told what they had seen and heard. The spreading of the gospel message to all nations was just beginning.

Christians should not fear sharing their faith. The Holy Spirit empowers believers to be witnesses of Christ and provides needed words.

Confirmed by Scripture (Acts 2:12-16)

One can imagine the bewilderment that went through Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost when a man from Libya could understand a man speaking in Galilean. Peter seized this opportunity not to be afraid like he was at the crucifixion of Jesus, but to be bold about his life changing relationship with his Savior.

Peter answered the questions from the crowd by explaining that this event as well as the empty tomb was prophesied in Scripture (vv. 14-16). Peter used Scripture to explain what had happened that day.

What a personal triumph for Peter. The power of the Holy Spirit at work in his life using him to speak on behalf of the truth found in Scripture.

The truth about Jesus as Savior is not invalidated by someone's latest blog posting he is not the Son of God. When someone speaks about Jesus, the testimony is determined to be truthful because it conforms to the word of God and is validated by the Holy Spirit.

The next time an opportunity comes your way to be a witness for Christ, remember you are commissioned by Jesus, filled by the Holy Spirit, and the Scriptures will confirm the truth.