



**“Gifted, Empowered Witnesses
of the Risen, Ascended Christ”**

Acts 1:1-9
September 17, 2023

Good morning, brothers and sisters. It is good to see all of you, and isn't it good to be gathered here today in the world famous and lovely, Southern California? What a wonderful place to live in it is. It is a little bit more overcast than we are used to this time of year. It is kind of cloudy this morning. However, the forecast says that it is going to a very nice 77 degrees this afternoon with an overnight low of about 63. Is that not just ideal weather?

About twelve miles down the 605 South is lovely Seal Beach, California. It's a nice spot with warm sand and the gentle breezes and palm trees. There are quaint shops and restaurants there too. I have eaten at quite a few of them. All of this is nestled against the Pacific Ocean. It is such an ideal spot.

Or you can jump on the 91 freeway to the east and go hang out at Knott's Berry Farm, with all of its thrill rides and attractions. Or you can go even further to the east on the 5 freeway and go all the way to Disneyland with its even better thrill rides and attractions, many would argue.

Or you can just keep on going down the 5 freeway and go into Orange County with all of its beautiful people and plush shopping centers that are again world famous. Southern California here we are, baby! Or you can go the other direction on the 5 freeway north, get on the 101 freeway and cruise into Hollywood, California—the home of show business with their theaters. Southern California, here we are. This is where we live. This is home.

All throughout the atmosphere of it all, amongst the people that we dwell with, there is a worldview of the inherent goodness of the human race. “We are all good people.” That is the mindset. You will hear it stated, “Hey, I'm okay. You are okay. You do you and I will do me. Let's affirm each other and if there is a God, He or she loves us all. So let's affirm one another as the good people that we are.”

There are other worldviews that we are living among, but that is the prevailing one. I even saw it on a coffee cup in yet another home store that Kristy and I were shopping in this weekend. It said, “You can be whatever you want to be,” declaring the autonomy of each individual person over their own life.

And here we are, a small but lovely community of Christians called Bethel Grace. Here we are with the knowledge that there is one Triune God-Father, Son, and Spirit. The Creator. The Sustainer. The Authority over all things. With the knowledge that there is one Living God. He is holy, holy, holy, and His eyes are too pure, according to the prophet Habakkuk, to look upon evil, and we would understand that He is too pure to look upon wickedness and sin without judging it.

He is righteous and we are not. He is righteous and from His holiness proceeds His Law that we have all transgress every single day. We, along with everybody else, our years are numbered and we are living in the midst of a sea of humanity, walking headlong into death and into eternity and into judgment for the sin that we each deserve for our dismissiveness toward the holiness of God.

In the midst of all of this, God is good. In the midst of all of this, God is kind. In the midst of all of this, there is the knowledge that God has provided a way of cleansing, of forgiveness, of eternal salvation and eternal life in joy in Heaven; the Heaven of heavens. And that salvation comes only through the Name and through faith in Jesus Christ who came into the world and lived flawlessly with holiness, who died on the cross for sin, who was raised on the third day, and who was raised and perched up at the right hand of the Father in Heaven.

Here we are with the knowledge of the God of All Creation, with the knowledge of His salvation and we might ask and should ask in an environment like this in Southern California full of comforts, entertainment, pleasures and pleasantness, how can we be used of the Lord to help people sober up to eternal realities? How can we make a mark for the Kingdom? How can we see people reached for Christ, that they might enter into the glory of Heaven with all of those who believe in Him?

We need the same power that was poured out upon a ragtag group of men from the country region of Galilee in Northern Israel. The calling was upon their lives to go proclaim repentance and the forgiveness of sin through Jesus to a region that was closed off to that message by the powers that be.

When you read the book of Acts, what you find is that this unsophisticated group of men were used by the Lord to turn their world upside down and see so many people brought into the joy of salvation. In the account of what God did through them, we see the power by which it was done, the power that remains active in the world today, the power that God desires to release through Bethel Grace Baptist Church, and every church that calls upon His Name.

The account of all of this comes to us from the heart of the Savior through the pen of a man named Luke written to an early benefactor of the church, a man named Theophilus. Luke did painstaking research to provide a trustworthy, orderly, historically accurate account of the life of Christ. We know that account as the Gospel of Luke.

This morning, brothers and sisters, we open up to the sequel to the Gospel of Luke. The Acts of the Apostles. It is a continuation of the story of the work and the grace and the Gospel of Christ through His church. It is a continuation of the story that proceeds into this very day that are a part of.

Let's see how this wonderful book of Scripture opens up. Let's see the power that it presents to us for the mission that Jesus calls us to. Acts Chapter 1 and Verses 1 through 9:

¹In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, ²until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. ³He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

⁴And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me, ⁵for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

⁶So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” ⁷He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. ⁸But 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.” ⁹And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.

Amen. May God bless the reading of His Word.

Here this morning, we begin our journey through the book of Acts together, and what an expedition it is going to be. It is going to be like an extended road trip. It starts in Jerusalem and makes its way into all of Judea, even into the culturally distinct region of Samaria. Then it travels all along the roads of the vast Roman Empire and in the midst of all of this, each week it is going to be leading to a certain place. This journey is going to be leading us to Southern California where the story continues on.

I love California, and I am praying that God will give me an increased love for the people of California that they might know the Savior who owns it all, and that the L.A. Basin would more and more be filled with the glory of people coming to know Jesus, and that He would use us, even us, in this effort to reach the lost.

Echoing through this entire study, I want these words of the Messiah to ring forth in our church, because they ring forth through all of the book of Acts. This is the decree of King Jesus to us:

“you will be my witnesses” Acts 1:8 (ESV)

You will tell people about who I am and what I have done. You will be my witnesses. That was true of them back then, and that is true of the beloved that I am looking upon right now and the man that is standing up in front of you.

A witness is a person who gives testimony. This is what the book of Acts is all about, being witnesses. The people of God being filled with the Spirit of God being anointed with the power of God to spread the knowledge of the Son of God, all according to the perfect plan of God. A witness is a person who testifies about certain realities. Christians are called to be witnesses of Christ.

As far as being a witness goes, there are objective realities that we attest to and there are subjective realities that we attest to. The objective realities are that Christian witnesses bear witness to the historical events of the life, atoning death of Christ for sinners, His resurrection from the grave, and His ascension to the right hand of the Father. These are objective, historical facts that Luke went to painstaking effort to give an accurate account of in the Gospel of Luke. And we are those who testify to those objective realities.

Then there are a subjective aspect of it as well. Christians also bear witness about their experience of those things. So Christian witness does not only testify to what Christ has done, but they give testimony about what Christ has done for them. It is their experience in this great salvation—that I was dead in sin and Christ raised me up. I was blind to the plights and that Jesus opened my eyes and He poured out on me such grace, and now I belong to a kingdom that is everlasting. I have been delivered from the penalty of my sin and I have been raised to new life in Jesus. This is what He has done for me and we tell our stories.

There are objective aspects of witnessing. There are subjective aspects of it, and here again is the word of Jesus to us, Bethel Grace:

“you will be my witnesses” Acts 1:8 (ESV)

Bethel Grace, we need this. We need the truth and the accounts that book of Acts brings to us.

Witnessing for Jesus is not easy. Many Christians struggle with this and it is something resisted by the enemy. It is ridiculed by some people in the world and most Christians are inactive in witnessing.

If you want to watch a fellow brother or sister in Christ squirm, go up and ask them, “When was the last time you told an unbeliever about the Gospel of Jesus Christ?” There will perhaps be some hemming and hawing, even squirming. And we must ask ourselves when the was the last time we did that.

Without witnessing, churches stagnate. Without this aspect of the work of God, churches decline. When churches are silent in their witness, they do not have the vibrancy and the health that God wills for His church. Yet there is such renewal and revival when the church reaches out.

Brothers and sisters, let’s talk about some realities here for a moment. Our attendance here at Bethel Grace has leveled out at about 140 people for several years, and such a wonderful group of people whom I love. Week in and week out. Year after year. About ten years ago, attendance was about 60 to 80 more than that. Going further back into the history of Bethel Grace, it was about double that.

So I would say that attendance figures are going the opposite direction of the way I would like to see them go. How about you? I would love to see the pews at Bethel Grace filled first of all with believers, Christians being strengthened in their faith through the serious teaching of the Bible. Through the teaching, praying, singing of Scripture.

And I would love to see the pews of Bethel Grace being filled with people not only being strengthened in their faith, but with new believers growing in their faith. And unbelievers being introduced to Jesus. What a joyful thing. Oh, how we need to pray and ask the Lord for renewal in these things.

Bethel Grace Baptist Church, pray that God will, by His hand, embolden us and strengthen us and that we in the Spirit would be obedient to His call to be witnesses for Jesus to the people that He is placing in our lives, because this is where churches experience full vitality in pure biblical worship and in a sense of mission that they are being obedient to, to reach out to people with the Gospel, and by God's grace seeing people come to know Jesus.

Will you pray with me? This is what the book of Acts is all about. The church of Jesus reaching out, both being edified by their worship and being propelled out to people that need to know Jesus. Let's pray and ask God for this. That the boldness that characterizes this book will characterize the church that we call Bethel Grace—the house of God's grace, where we want to see people growing in the Lord. This is what Acts helps us with.

Back in the First Century, it seems that there was a man who may have needed similar encouragement. He was a Gentile man of prominence and he is remembered by the name of Theophilus.

¹In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach

The implication there is that it was just the beginning of what Jesus began to do and teach, and that there was more that Jesus would do as His instruction went on.

But this man, Theophilus, his name means *lover of God* or probably *beloved of God*. It takes the Greek word for God, Theos, and beloved which is the language of affection. Beloved of God. Lover of God. This may have been his real name or maybe it was a nickname given to him by the church because he seemed to have had a very positive disposition toward the people of God and the work that God was doing in the world.

It is evident that Theophilus was a man of standing and means in the world. In Luke Chapter 1 and Verse 3 he is called *Most Excellent Theophilus*. That was a phrase and a title that was given and used of people who were often in high government positions. Clearly, this man had an interest in the things of Christ. The occurrences that are connected to His life. His teaching and His church.

The message of Christ was entering his ears and it seems that the Gospel of Christ was entering his heart and he was in a position perhaps to do some things to help the church. He was in a position where he was perhaps coming to faith in Christ and he needed to know the certainty of the things that were spreading about Christ if he was going to stick his neck out and become a believer, or help the church in a time when the church was under persecution in Rome. Theophilus needed some assurance.

Reading the prologues to both Luke and Acts, Luke was pleading with Theophilus that this was real. This was true. This was history. These things have happened. “Theophilus, I have done interviews with all of those who are eyewitnesses, and you can be sure that what I am telling you is real” And as the Spirit of God was moving through these accounts in the heart of Theophilus, he would have been emboldened as he was responding by faith.

It is that same boldness that we desire as followers of Jesus Christ. I praise God for all the ways that He is working in our church, and for the beautiful things that we see happening, and I pray going into this study that the Lord would make us bold as those who are witnesses for Jesus.

This morning we set our attention on the first nine verses of Acts. They point us to a preparatory time for the disciples. It was a time when Jesus was still saying, “Now, wait because there is a gift coming to you that you need to be carried in the power of.” We see this in the resurrection appearances of Jesus where the disciples were getting ongoing and final preparation for the work and ministry that they would be called to do out in the world. As the disciples were being prepared, we are also being prepared by the Spirit of God here today.

Let’s see three aspects this morning of how God was preparing His disciples and was about to send them out, praying that we can take these things with the desire to be those fully equipped as well.

To prepare us as witnesses, God gives:

1. Another presentation of the Risen Christ (1:1-3)

We see it again in these introductory verses:

¹In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, ²until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. ³He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

That phrase, “He presented himself alive to them after his suffering.” He was pulverized and mocked and mocked and pulverized by the Jews and by the Romans. Afterwards, He was crucified, nailed to the cross where He died for sin.

On the third day He rose from the grave. He was lifted from death to life and Jesus presented Himself in His vibrant, healthy, human flesh that retained only the marks in His hands, feet, and side. Jesus presented Himself repeatedly alive to His disciples. He ministered to them until they knew that they knew that they knew that Jesus was alive.

You can see the way the He went about doing that. He did it by appearing to them, repeatedly. Eating food, saying, “I am not just an aberration. Give me some of that fish and let me wrap it in some bread.” Eating food in front of them. Inviting Thomas to touch Him. Put your hands in the wounds.

Jesus was ministering to the disciples repeatedly, presenting Himself in history as raised and alive from the grave. Then we see that the resurrection of Jesus was a repeated cornerstone of the apostolic preaching all throughout the book of Acts. Jesus is alive! Someone rose from the grave in human history. Jesus continues to present Himself alive to His people.

There are two ways that Jesus presents Himself alive to us. No, we don't have resurrection appearances like they did during that forty day span, which was concluded with His ascension up into Heaven. We are more in the position of Theophilus who also did not get to see those resurrection appearances tangibly with Jesus standing right in front of him.

But there are two ways that Jesus continues to present Himself alive to His people. He presents Himself alive through the historical record of His life, which is given to us in the pages of Scripture, the very Scriptures that are saturated with the power of the Holy Spirit to revive dead hearts to life.

I love that story in Luke Chapter 24 with the two disciples and Jesus on the road to Emaus. The two disciples did not realize until the very end that they were walking with Jesus but when they shared about that with the others, they said, "When He was teaching us about the Christ all throughout the pages of Scripture, our hearts were burning."

And today, Christ reveals Himself in the pages of Scripture, which comes with the very same power that God exerted in His Word at the beginning of time, when God spoke all thing into existence. So we come humbly before the Lord, saying, "Lord, help us to truly see. Let the reading and teaching of Scripture be empowered by Your Spirit in such a way that like them, we know that we know that we know that Christ is alive." Jesus is presenting Himself in the testimony of Scripture, which is the very breath of God speaking to us today.

There is another way that Jesus is continuing to show Himself alive. By the sacrament of Baptism! Sacrament aka ordinances, which are ordained of the heart of Jesus. And there are two of them. Ongoing, tangible displays of the Christ for us. One is the Lord's Supper, which is constantly bringing the death of Christ for sinners like us before our eyes and even between our teeth and into our stomachs.

Then there is baptism which is also a presentation of the death of Christ. But also, it is a presentation of the resurrection of Christ as the new believer comes and declares before the people of God, "This is what Jesus has done for me. I am immersed in His death with Him. He has redeemed me and paid the price for my sin, and I am raised up in new life with Him." This is a visual demonstration of the life of Christ spreading to more and more people.

Oh, Bethel Grace, the Sunday's that we have baptisms are just wonderful. Aren't they touched with grace and glory that is so good, as we hear testimonies from people saying, "Jesus has saved me and I am a new creation in Him."

It is wonderful, and Jesus is continuing through these means to speak into the life of His church. All throughout the book of Acts, we are going to see baptisms taking place. Let's pray that we will see the Risen Christ in the testimonies of those He has redeemed.

How about if we think about the people in our lives that don't know Jesus. If not at this moment, how about this afternoon we take some time with the Lord, saying, "Lord, give me a vision of my unsaved family members, neighbors, unsaved coworker. Give me a vision of them in the pool of baptism somewhere, testifying to the life of Christ in them."

Let's have this picture in our minds of them receiving the broken bread of communion. Hands lifted in praise. That has happened over and over and over again, and let's pray that it will happen more and more and more to the glory of God and to the great joy of the church. Jesus continues to present Himself alive in these ways.

To prepare us as witnesses, God gives another presentation of the risen Christ here at the beginning of the book of Acts. Continuing, we see another way that God prepares us and moves us forward as witnesses. He gives:

2. Another assurance of the Holy Spirit (1:4-8)

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus had been preparing His disciples. Especially when you look at the Gospel of John in the portion of it called the Upper Room Discourse in John Chapters 14 through 16, Jesus prepared His disciples for the fact that He was going away and He told them, "When I go the Comforter, the Friend, the One bringing you power is going to come. It is the fresh power of the Holy Spirit."

So there is the promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit that was increasing in its frequency as the death of Christ was approaching. Then we see it given yet again in the resurrection appearance of the Lord.

To prepare us as witnesses, God gives another assurance of the Holy Spirit. Acts Chapter 1 and Verses 4 and 5:

⁴And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me, ⁵for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

Here we have the language of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. I want for us as a church to have a very positive view of this doctrine of the baptism of the Holy Spirit because it is an awesome picture and reality. That being the case, I am going to start with a warning.

There are many who assert that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is a post-conversion, second-blessing experience evidenced by the sign of speaking in tongues. And if you are not speaking in tongues, then you are not baptized in the Holy Spirit. Let me give you a word for that teaching.

RUBISH! I hope to go into more detail about this when we see the actual outpouring of the Spirit in Acts Chapter 2. So there is more on this to come.

However, let's begin by seeing how the baptism of the Holy Spirit was prophesied by John the Baptist—that the baptism in the Holy Spirit was something that was going to be experienced by all of the people coming with contrite hearts and in repentance and faith in Jesus. John baptized with water and he promised what was coming which was the baptism of the Holy Spirit. John was speaking to all of the people that were coming with contrite hearts, saying:

“I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” (Matthew 3:11 (ESV))

So we have Jesus mindful of that and speaking of it. Jesus was saying that it was coming very, very soon to that First Century early community of believers.

What are we talking about with the language of being baptized in the Holy Spirit? Remember that the basic meaning of the word baptizo is where we get the word baptism from. And it is to be immersed in something; to be soaked in something.

Yes, you can point out different times in Scripture where baptism was done by sprinkling, but the basic meaning and dominant use of the word baptism is to immerse. It is to be totally inundated. To be soaked and saturated. Jesus was saying, “You are going to be saturated in the presence and in the power of the Holy Spirit of Heaven. He will be in you and you will be in Him.”

Just like the children of Israel carried the presence of God with the Ark of the Covenant through the wilderness, now the church, the new covenant community, would carry the holy presence of God with them through the world. This is the presence and the love and the power of the Holy Spirit in, upon, and through His people.

At conversion, we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. We are then indwelt with Him. Then throughout the Christian walk we say, “Lord, fill me afresh with the Spirit that I have been given by faith.” This baptism of the Holy Spirit is the reality that the Spirit intends to come into our lives with power in us and through us.

Did you see what Jesus said to His disciples? He said, “Don't depart from Jerusalem. I found you in that Upper Room and it might be a good idea if you stayed there. Don't depart from Jerusalem until the promise of the Spirit has come.”

Those men were well trained. They had been trained by the Messiah for three years. They were prepared and equipped but Jesus told them, “You need the power and outpouring of the Spirit. The indwelling of the Spirit of the church is about to come, and you need to wait for that.”

So Jesus told them, “Wait for the promise of the Father that you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” Not is not a very definite time marker, is it? “Not many days from now.” I know some of you well enough to know that that kind of lack of definition would drive you nuts. “Not many days from now.”

“Well, Jesus, how many days from now?” “Not many days from now.” “Well, is it going to be a Monday or a Tuesday or Thursday or a Friday?” “Not many days from now.” Jesus said to wait for the movement of the Spirit.

There are times where we too are called to wait and such waiting keeps us close to the Lord in prayer and in expectation. Close to His heart. Close to His side. Sometimes we need to be patient, and then the Lord moves and we must move forward in His power. The disciples were looking for a time marker. Jesus did not give them definition, so they were not going to get the exact detail as to when the outpouring was going to take place.

So the disciples moved to another issue that they would appreciate a little bit of clarity about as far as timing goes. It says in Verse 6:

‘So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?”

We preachers like to make sport of the disciples. We like to kind of bash on them from time to time. When you look at the Gospel accounts, you can see that the disciples were easy targets, as if the rest of us are not. But the disciples were easy targets. We can look at some of the things they did and said. Bickering. Infighting. Then we say, “Lord, those guys! Can you believe them?”

Some Bible commentators kind of go in that direction with the question in Verse 6, judging it as totally off base and out of line. Once again, the disciples were filled with nationalistic zeal and delusions of grandeur, seeing themselves potentially as high-ranking positions perched with the Messiah.

I was very, very tempted to go there. But with some reading and reflection. In fact this question was off topic, but it was not necessarily wrong-headed because this was a significant theme in the writings of Luke. The hope of restored Israel was beautifully and vividly displayed in the Christmas narrative of Luke Chapters 1 and 2, where Godly men and women were longing for the consolation of Israel.

That is how Simeon spoke of it when Jesus was being brought to the temple for dedication.

Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. Luke 2:25 (ESV)

They wanted their land to be released from its place underneath the oppressive boot of Rome. They yearned for the renewal of heart and worship among the people of Israel. They wanted to see people made right with God. It is such of a beautiful picture.

And the way that Jesus went on to answer the disciple's question is very interesting. He said to them in Verse 7:

⁷... "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.

This does not rule out the fact that there is going to be a wonderful restoration for the people of Israel. Read Romans Chapters 9 through 11 for more on that.

However, Jesus was redirecting the disciples. They were thinking about national Israel and the glory of God displayed through a particular country, and Jesus was saying, "We are doing something different right now. What we are doing is sending My people out into the nations of the earth."

So Jesus redirected the disciple's attention. He said, "The timing of that aspect of the Father's plan is not for you to know." This is the essence of what He said in Verse 7. Then Jesus said this, "What is for you to know is what is coming into your life, because you are going to be My witnesses and God is going to empower you for the path. Verse 8:

⁸But 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.

There Jesus gave concentric circles of expanding territory, both geographically and culturally. The word of Jesus rings forth to each child of God here today. "You will receive power and you will be my witnesses." So we say, "Lord, bring Your power into our lives. Let there be more of it!" I don't know about you, but I long for more power as I have been reflecting on it this week, saying, "Lord, let there be more of it." I think to myself, *why hasn't there been more of it?*

Do any of you recognize this? (Pastor holds up a power strip.) Do you know what you do with it? You plug this strip into an electrical outlet in the wall. Then you can plug your cell phone charger into the strip, or your laptop computer cord, a lamp, or a television. Then all of your devices will get charged up. Electricity is meant to move through the power strip to benefit other items. But what happens if you plug the power strip into itself? A power strip is meant to be a conduit for power. It does not provide the power. Rather, power moves through it.

I wonder how many of us do so much in the Christian life in our own efforts, without really going before the Lord repeatedly as He desires us to do—being saturated in the truths of Scripture to have our hearts filled with the knowledge and the truth of who God is, so we can be empowered by the Living Word of God afresh. Quietly, say, "Lord, fill me with Your truth. Lord, I am praying and calling upon You to open my eyes to the need and the possibilities when I do."

Are we really taking time before the Lord, seeking Him for the fresh power that only He can give? Or are we just mindless most days, rushing into things with minimal if any prayer? Prone to wander, Lord I feel it. So in the midst of this, I ask, “Lord, just draw me into Your grace. We all need You to draw us in, and be empowered in the world because heavenly ministry cannot be done in human flesh.”

Sometimes I think about a man in the Old Testament that really encourages me. He received a promise from God that is right in tune with what we are talking about here. He had a great name, Zerubbabel. He was a leader in Israel’s post exilic era in history. He was the main point leader who was there to see through the conclusion of the rebuilding of the temple that had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar’s army. They laid the foundation and that is as far as the work went. Finishing the temple was neglected and just left.

Every time Zerubbabel walked by that place, I picture him sighing with disillusionment. And he was a man in need of encouragement. And children of the Living God—the God who created and sustains everything—sometimes our hearts get low and discouraged.

So the Lord gave Zerubbabel a vision, given through the prophet Zechariah. It was a vision of a giant lampstand Menorah. There were two olive trees in a reservoir and the lamp was somehow connected to the reservoir, and there was a supply of unending oil from the provision of God being displayed to Zerubbabel.

Zerubbabel needed a fresh picture and vision of things. So God gave him that vision and here is the application to Zerubbabel, and it also rings forth into today

⁶Then he said to me, “This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts.

Not by human power, not by human strength, God’s work can only be carried out in God’s power.

Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts. ⁷Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain. And he shall bring forward the top stone amid shouts, ‘Grace, grace to it!’” Zechariah 4:6-7 (ESV)

This is just a reminder that from even Old Testament days into New Testament days, sometimes the hearts of the people of God need to be refreshed in the knowledge of the power that the God who loves us wants to work through us. So let’s hear the voice of the Savior.

⁸But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you

Let’s just be reminded of the unending supply that comes from the heart of the God who loves us, and let’s ask Him for a fresh vision of those that He desires to love through us, and for the power that He gives for the message of salvation through Jesus.

Point three is just a preview of next week. It is that way by design. This is a teaser for what we are going to be talking about next time.

To prepare us as His witnesses, God gives:

3. Another vision of the Ascended King (1:9)

⁹And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.

We tend to think of the ascension as the means by which Jesus was transported to Heaven. It was that but, believe me, it was more than just a super-awesome, dazzling exclamation point to the resurrection appearances.

The ascension of Christ was the opening of a new era under the reigning King of Heaven, the Victorious Messiah, Christ Jesus, who pours out His Spirit upon His people and who is with them every step of the way with His love, truth, perspective, and His grace, desiring to fill their lives with His presence and to reach others in His Name. He is the Ascended Lord and we are going to talk about that a little bit more the next time around.

For now, let's close in prayer.