

A Church of Irresistible Influence

A 'City Reaching' Church

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Bonita Wood

Today we will be baptizing a beautiful young lady named Morgan. Morgan is a young teen. And she has made the most important decision of her life – to give her life to Jesus Christ.

To accept that he is her Savior – saving her from her sins and that he is her Lord – the one who will guide her decisions, her direction, her life. And Morgan will also receive a gift when she is baptized.

In Acts 2:38 we are told that something very exceptional lies within each Christian.

When we obey Jesus by repenting of our sins and being buried in Christian Baptism, we have the promise that we shall receive a gift – the gift of the Holy Spirit.

It says this in Acts 2:38 as Peter one of Jesus' followers is speaking, "Each of you must turn from your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

So how is it that Peter knows this:

It is because Jesus told him.

When Jesus was alive – his disciples had walked with him, eaten with him, watched as he preached, taught and performed miracles and they had even been sent out to do the same things.

Jesus had spent his entire ministry developing and equipping these disciples of his - to impact their worlds.

At the end of the gospel of Luke we see the risen Christ speaking to Peter and the rest of his **disciples and telling them this: "Yes, it was written long ago that the Messiah must suffer and die and rise again from the dead on the third day. With my authority, take this message of repentance to all the nations, beginning in Jerusalem..."**

Jesus goes on to say wait here in the city until the Holy Spirit comes and fills you with power."(Luke 24:46)

Jesus is telling them that 'something is coming, and it will begin in Jerusalem – in their city.'

Jesus clarifies what he is saying even further when in Acts, which is also written by Luke, Jesus says this to the disciples in chapter 1 verse 8

Look at your sermon notes with me to see what Jesus says here and let's read it out loud together: **“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere – in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria and to the ends of the earth.”**

Jesus is telling the disciples and us that we are going to receive the power to share a specific message and that he has a strategy for how we are to share that message.

He explains that there are 4 parts to the strategy:

First Jerusalem – the city they are in. In other words, start where you are.

Then throughout Judea – the region that surrounds your city.

Next in Samaria – across your nation and as you do that you will cross cultural barriers.

And then Jesus says – **the ends of the earth** – that means the message is going global.

When I go with the mission team this summer to Tanzania, Africa we will be engaging in the 4th part of this strategy. So we will be following the plan and strategy of Christ in his final instructions to the disciples.

Over the course of the next few weeks, we will be looking to Acts 1:8 as well as other scriptures in the book of Acts to understand what a **church of irresistible influence looks like**.

If you look on the back of your sermon notes, you will see that we encourage you to read the entire book of Acts and here is why.

With the coming of the Holy Spirit, the church came into existence. The early church had seen the need to share their message of Christ's salvation by following Jesus' strategy. As more and more people heard the good news, they began telling others and sharing their stories. And the ripple effect that started in the book of Acts continues to emanate throughout the earth today.

And you and I and Morgan get to be a part of that process.

So today I want to look again at those final instructions and the first part of this strategy – the city where we are.

As we do that I want us to be thinking about the answer to a question:

How do we become a city-reaching church?

Jesus tells the disciples and us that we are to be his witnesses.

Miriam Webster dictionary defines a witness as: *one who has personal knowledge of something, or as an attestation of a fact or event; a testimony.*

The verses in Luke and in Acts tell us that there is a specific message we are to share as Jesus' witnesses:

The Message:

Jesus was crucified but God raised him from the dead.

There are lots of verses in the bible that attest to this but let me share a couple with you from the book of Acts again.

Peter and the disciples are gathered together in the city, in Jerusalem when the Holy Spirit comes upon them.

The people gathered around them, not understanding what is happening think perhaps the disciples may be drunk.

And in the 2nd chapter it says:

Then Peter stepped forward with the eleven other disciples and shouted to the crowd...People of Israel listen! God publicly endorsed Jesus of Nazareth by doing wonderful miracles, wonders, and signs through him, as you well know. But you followed God's prearranged plan. With the help of lawless Gentiles, you nailed him to the cross and murdered him. However, God released him from the horrors of death and raised him back to life again..." Acts 2:14a &22-24a)

Now the reason I wanted to share these particular bible verses with you is because of that first statement... **Then Peter stepped forward with the eleven other disciples and shouted to the crowd – People of Israel listen!**

Movements get stuck in a person's mind don't they.

When my children were little, I would sing their ABC's to them as they brushed their teeth. I had read somewhere that if you go through the ABC's twice it was a fair amount of time for them to brush their teeth.

And in the process they learned their ABC's.

So there are times today when I am brushing my teeth that I find myself saying the ABC's in my mind as I do it.

Movements can get stuck and this is an extremely important moment – not just for Peter but for the entire history of Christianity.

Jesus has been crucified and at that time Peter was so afraid that he had denied even knowing him.

Now just a few weeks later we have Peter standing up boldly, shouting out loudly to the crowd, **People of Israel listen!**

Had Peter not done this, what Christ did on the cross would very likely have become a footnote in history.

These people of Israel were laughing at the disciples, how easy it would have been for the flow of the moment to just keep going –

And for all the people to just walk away thinking the disciples were a bunch of drunken fools.

But Peter refused to let that happen.

Empowered by the Holy Spirit, he proclaimed the message:

Jesus was crucified but God raised him from the dead.

Let me ask you – What about you???

I know that it only takes one person, in a school, a community, in a church to get the message so clearly that they are willing to stand up, raise their voice, and address the situation, the crowd, the world.

That is what Morgan is going to do today/ has done today.

She was witnessed to by someone who shared the message and now she is witnessing today by her actions as she proclaims the message.

So again I ask: What about you??

Make no mistake about it: The first step toward becoming a church of irresistible influence is to know the message and then be willing to boldly stand up for it.

In taking our message out to the city and becoming a city reaching church – the book of Acts clearly shows us the METHOD that they used in the early church to light up their city with the Message of Christ.

They used 4 standard operating procedures.

They were:

MEETING NEEDS; PRAYER; UNITY; AND TEACHING

Acts 3:1-3 gives us one example of **MEETING NEEDS**

It says – “Peter and John went to the Temple one afternoon to take part in the 3:00 prayer service. As they approached the Temple, a man lame from birth was being carried in.....When he saw Peter and John about to enter he asked them for some money.”

Peter and John were busy, and on their way to a prayer meeting. But they stop what they are doing to meet the needs of this man. The story goes on to tell us that they healed the man.

There is the old saying that “A person doesn’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.”

IN order to share the message, sometimes we first must share in meeting whatever need the person might have.

If we want to be a city reaching church of irresistible influence, meeting the needs of others will be mandatory.

PRAYER

In Acts 4 we find Peter and John having been arrested, beaten and released from court after being warned to never preach about Jesus again. They return to meet with the church and tell them all that has happened.

Then it goes on to say, “Then all the believers were united as they lifted their voices in **prayer to God.**”

This church knew who their source was.

They believed God was guiding them every step of the way and so they cry out to him. Not so that they can stop what they are doing.

NO - they unite in prayer so that God will continue to give them boldness in preaching, continue to guide them so they can reach out and light up their city, to the ones who need to hear the message of Jesus’ saving grace.

Evangelist D.L. Moody was walking down a Chicago street one day when he saw a man leaning against a lamppost. The evangelist gently put his hand on the man’s shoulder and asked him if he was a Christian. The fellow raised his fists and angrily exclaimed, "Mind your own business!"

Moody replied, "I’m sorry if I’ve offended you, but to be very frank, you are my business!"

I believe that Moody was able to be so bold because if you have ever read anything about Moody, you know that when he would go out to preach the message to those in the city, he always started by praying to his source first.

The third part of the METHOD – **UNITY** – really means that the church has learned to trust each other.

Acts 4:32 says, “All the believers were one in heart and mind...”

Unity happens in a church when the need out there becomes greater to us than our own preferences in here.

If you are a military person you would get this concept very quickly.

An army that is moving in opposite directions will lose everytime –

But when they unite – well that is a completely different outcome.

One heart, one mind and victory.

A church united in heart and mind, as the early church was, has unstoppable power. **And Acts tells us that their numbers grew daily.**

And the last operating procedure to help us become a church of irresistible influence is **TEACHING.**

The high priest in Acts 5:28 is telling the disciples – “Didn’t we tell you never again to teach in this man’s name. Instead, you have filled all Jerusalem with your teaching about Jesus...”

Wouldn’t it be great if people said about us – You have filled all of Tipp City with your teaching about Jesus.

The disciples had gone out into the city, centered around a teaching that proclaimed Jesus as Lord of all.

They focused on it, they looked to it for direction, and they let it fuel their fire for the city as they shared it with others.

WE have a message to stand up and boldly proclaim.

We have a method to use to accomplish that by meeting needs, praying, uniting together as one in heart and mind and by teaching others about Christ.

In Acts Jesus tells the early church and each one of us that under the power of the Holy Spirit, we are to be his witnesses – his church of irresistible influence if you will – and become a city reaching church by starting right where we are.

Reformation Theologian and Pastor - John Calvin echoes this when he said: *“There is no believer whom the Son of God does not require to be his witness. In what place, at what time, with what degree of frequency, in what manner, and to what extent we ought to profess our faith, cannot easily be determined by a fixed rule: but we must consider the occasion, that not one of us may fail to discharge his duty at the proper time.”*

A skeptic promised British preacher Alexander Maclaren (1826-1910) that he would attend his church for four Sundays on which Maclaren would be presenting the main tenets of Christianity. The skeptic listened intently to Maclaren’s sermons. After the fourth message he presented himself for church membership, saying he had received Christ as his Savior.

Maclaren was delighted and could not resist the impulse to ask which of the four sermons brought him to this decision. The skeptic replied, "Your sermons, sir, were helpful, but they were not what finally persuaded me." He said that after church one Sunday as he was helping an elderly lady on a slippery walk, she looked up into his face and said, "I wonder if you know my Savior, Jesus Christ. He is everything in the world to me. I would like you to know Him too."

It was a simple comment, but with the working of the Holy Spirit, it changed a skeptic’s heart as no power-filled sermon could do.

So What about YOU?