

A PLAN THAT WORKS

ACTS 1:6-8

Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

In 1900 the world's population was 1.6 billion people. *Today, it's 7.3 billion...* In 1900 an American's life expectancy was 47.3 years. *Today, it's 78.7 years...*

In 1900 there were 8000 cars in America. *Today, there are over 263 million...* In 1900 the land speed record was less than 2 mph. *Today, your 16 year-old can breeze by at 45 mph - as fast as any human needs to go...* In 1900, steak sold for 13 cents a pound. *Today, steak sells for \$7.93...* In 1900 there were 5 Atlanta streets named "*Peachtree.*" *Today, it's 71..."*

It's amazing how life has changed in the last one-hundred years. In fact, it's amazing how life has changed in just the last 18 years - way back in 2000...

Every year when the Fall Semester kicks off at Beloit College in Wisconsin the school publishes a list.

It's called "[The Mindset List.](#)" And it's become quite popular. It provides a social barometer - a glimpse of how the incoming freshmen class sees the world.

Here's the social portrait of the Class of 2021...

Peanuts comic strips have always been repeats.

There have always been emojis to cheer them up.

The Panama Canal has always belonged to Panama

They have always been searching for Pokemon.

Whatever the subject, it has always had a blog.

United States Supreme Court decisions have always been available to read on a website.

Justin Timberlake has always been a solo act.

There's always been a digital swap meet called eBay

West Nile has always been a virus found in the U.S.

Vladimir Putin has always been calling the shots at the Kremlin.

The USA has always been at war in Afghanistan.

The Class of 2021 has never had to watch a television program at its scheduled airing time.

"Nanny cams" have always been available to check up on the babysitter.

NFL coaches have always had the opportunity to throw a red flag and question the referee.

Snowboarding has always been an Olympic sport.

Wow, a lot has changed in the last eighteen years - not to mention the last one-hundred years...

And if our Lord Jesus delays His second coming, who knows the innovations and changes that'll appear over the **next** eighteen years: we may see *robotic nurses - driverless trucks - flying automobiles - pain free tattoo removal -*

breathalyzers for cars - laser beam guns - all this and more is just around the corner.

Study the past - and look to the future - and you realize the speed at which things change... **But you should also realize some things remain the same...**

In 1900, the distance between first and second base was 90 feet - same as today... In 1900, Georgia versus Georgia Tech was an important game - it's still a big deal... In 1900 parents fed, disciplined, and educated their kids - today, they're still their primary care givers.

In 1900, and 1990, and 2018, and in 2118 the Ten Commandments will still be the Ten Commandments - and Jesus will be the one and only way to heaven - passing time isn't going to produce any alterations."

Even after 100 years of progress there are still some certainties in life... *Kids still enjoy a piece of candy... A typical sunset is the prettiest painting you'll ever see... And a glass of water still tastes great on a hot day...*

I'm no prophet, but I predict the same things will still be enjoyable another one-hundred years from now.

There are *sights* and *insights* that never change.

That's why I put so much stock in the words of Jesus here in Acts 1:8. For just before He returned to heaven Jesus shared with His disciples His strategy for spreading the news of God's love to a loveless world.

And wow was it successful!

When Paul wrote to the Colossians around 60 AD he mentioned that the good news of Jesus had reached Colossi. Then he adds, *“As it has also in all the world.”*

In less than 30 years after Jesus’ resurrection the disciples who Jesus commissioned outside Jerusalem literally took the Gospel to the whole known world.

Without the aid of *video, CDs, downloads, printing, airplanes, cell phones, websites, satellites, the Internet, or even a PA system* the first Christians spread the Gospel throughout the entire Mediterranean world.

At the dawn of the first millennium Jesus instituted a plan to reach the world that remains His plan today.

He sends us out into our modern world with the same strategy He gave to His very first disciples...

And I believe if we follow Jesus’ timeless plan we’ll ultimately experience the very same success...

Much has changed in the last 2000 years, but much remains the same. Jesus’ words to His small band of disciples are just as applicable and relevant for us as they were for the disciples who first heard them.

He wanted them, *and He wants us*, to **receive power from the Holy Spirit - be witnesses - and share the Gospel** locally and globally, to the ends of the earth.

But in Acts 1 when the disciples approach Jesus the spread of the Gospel is not their primary concern.

Their minds are on *apocalyptic events - prophetic time tables - the end of the world*. They ask, *“Lord, will You at this*

time restore the kingdom to Israel?" They were thinking of His return. And over the centuries this has often been the preoccupation of the Church.

We're always looking at current events - trying to overlap them with biblical prophecies... *Who might be the Antichrist? Is Syria and Iran going to pull Russia into Israel? Will bar codes and scanners be the technology that creates the mark of the beast, etc...?*

Don't misunderstand I believe Jesus is coming soon to snatch away His Church, *and He wants us alert to the indicators.* In other passages Jesus has much to say about the end of the age, and the coming of His kingdom. Today, signs of the end times abound!

But in Acts 1 the Lord's primary concern for His disciples was not His return. Jesus was focused on the *meantime...* Between His **ascent** to heaven, and His **descent** at the rapture, there was work to be done!

In our text, the disciples are concerned about *the end of time*, but Jesus is concerned about *the end of people* - the quality of their lives and their eternities.

In John 9:4 Jesus said of His own mission on earth, *"I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work."*

The world we live in is going out of business, but there's work to be done before it ends. Jesus will return in a *flash* - and we should be watching and ready... but a more urgent concern is what kind of *splash* can we make on earth? How

can we count for Jesus? How can we impact others so they'll desire to come to Jesus?

In Acts 1:8 Jesus gives His followers their mission.

They're to influence the world with God's love and truth. And He sends out His troops in three postures: their **kneeling**, and **standing**, and **marching** - *they're on their knees*, and *on their feet*, and *on the move...*

Jesus tells them in verse 8, **"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."** This is also how we'll win the world of our day for Jesus.

It's how we'll impact Gwinnett County and the Hwy. 78 corridor. The strategy hasn't changed. The spoils go to the army that *kneels*, that *stands*, and that *marches*.

Admittedly, we're a small band of believers. Our apparent resources are limited. Though we've been around a while, many folks still don't know we exist...

But the outlook for us is just as bright as it was for Jesus' first followers. When the Church first started there were only 120 disciples, *fewer of them than of us*.

Yet their ranks soon swelled. Jesus' strategy worked in the year 32 AD, and again in the year 320 AD, and 1320, and 1720, and 1920, and it will still work in 2020.

We'll count for Jesus in this community - we'll reach people, and see them saved, and help them grow... by **kneeling**, and by **standing**, and by **marching**.

First, Jesus wants His Church to find its power on its **knees**... He promises, *“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you...”*

God’s plan for us involves our *kneeling, and standing, and marching* - but the sequence is crucial.

A child doesn’t walk until he learns to stand up - and he doesn’t stand until he first learns to crawl on his knees. A Christian’s mobility also begins on our knees.

Jesus has sent us out into a hostile world. In Ephesians 6:12 we’re warned what we’re up against: *“spiritual hosts of wickedness,”* evil *“principalities,”* wicked *“powers,”* *“rulers of the darkness of this age.”*

Ultimately, the battle is spiritual - our enemy is supernatural. Thus, *conventional weapons are useless.*

It’s not like Calvary Chapel is supporting the local VFW, or raising funds for the community center, or selling Girl Scout cookies - we’re locked in a life and death struggle for the eternal souls of men and women.

The stakes are high. This is why we need supernatural assistance. To do *God’s bidding* we need *God’s Spirit*. Pastor John Stott writes, *“Before Christ sent the Church into the world, He sent the Spirit into the Church. The same must be observed today.”*

Every year on New Year’s Day, Pasadena, CA, hosts the Tournament of Roses Parade. Floats are covered with flowers. It’s a gorgeous spectacle. Corporations and groups spend big bucks on their parade entry.

One year, in the midst of the parade - an especially elegant float started to sputter; then came to an abrupt stop. It turned out the float had run out of gasoline. The parade was halted until someone fetched a can of gas.

But what made the moment such an embarrassment was the out-of-gas float was sponsored by the Standard Oil Company... *with its vast oil reserves!*

And a church can resemble that out-of-gas float. We can be elegantly decorated, efficiently organized, abundantly subsidized - yet, if there is no gas in our tank we're not going anywhere. We become stranded.

Understand, it doesn't matter what gadgets a church buys, or what buildings they build, or what people they hire - *if they're out of gas they're not going anywhere.*

Above all else we need spiritual gas in the tank!

And we're sponsored by the spiritual equivalent of the Standard Oil Company. God has vast holdings of supernatural wisdom, and overcoming boldness, and divine love. Before we go out to win the world for Jesus let's stop and kneel, and make sure our tank is full.

Spiritual effectiveness begins in a kneeling posture. For the Holy Spirit to come upon us He needs the right surface to land. This is why we need to **bow low...**

Realize, when you bend to your knees it effects every other part of your body! When I bow *it drops my head, softens my heart, relaxes my stiff-neck, eases the strain on my eyes, even rests my arms and legs.*

Actually, a kneeling posture takes the pressure off every other part of the body - for all of my weight shifts to my knees. And the same is true figuratively...

A kneeling posture is an outward expression of an attitude of humility. Whenever I humble myself and acknowledge my need for God's help - when I roll the weight of the work and the burden of the responsibility onto God - I end up at rest. When I depend on the Spirit's movement my movements are more powerful.

It's been said, "When we rely on organization, we get what organization can do. When we rely on enthusiasm, we get what enthusiasm can do. When we rely on human excellence, we get what excellence can do. But when we rely on the Holy Spirit, we get what God can do." His efforts are vastly superior to ours!

In a work for God there is no substitute for spiritual power. Not well-greased organization, or slick presentations, or even state-of-the-art equipment.

We need God's Spirit to do God's work.

And He'll fill us to overflowing if we humbly ask.

If the Calvary Chapel movement has a motto it's Zechariah 4:6. "Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit," says the Lord..." God's Spirit fuels our witness.

The Holy Spirit is the power who guides our steps, and brings to fruition God's work in peoples' heart.

Let's always remember the secret of our strength!

This morning if you've run out of gas, and want to be filled with the Holy Spirit - or even refilled - as we take communion

we'll invite you to linger in the altar and receive prayer. **We'll ask God to fill our tank afresh!**

But after *kneeling*, God wants us **standing!**

He wants us on our knees, **and** on our feet. ***Don't you think it's time to really take a stand for Jesus?***

In Acts 1 Jesus tells His disciples, **"you shall be witnesses to Me."** He doesn't say, *"You shall witness."*

He says, **"You shall be witnesses..."** A witness is something you **be** - not something you **do**. The act of sharing our faith matters, only after we are a witness.

One of Christianity's fiercest skeptics once remarked, **"These Christians must show me they are redeemed before I will believe in their Redeemer."**

The proof is in the pudding.

A faith that doesn't impact you, and change your life shouldn't be exported. It's been said, **"The reason most people become Christians are other Christians. And the reason most people don't become Christians are other Christians."** A changed life has a *powerful appeal*. And a hypocritical life is a *powerful deterrent*.

Do you allow your relationship with Jesus to influence all your other relationships?... Does a love for God permeate every area of your life?... Are all your perspectives and habits filtered through God's Word?... **Do you live your creed, or merely quote it?**

I love the story of Sun Lee... Sun Lee and his family were Vietnamese refugees. They came to our country with nothing

but the shirt on their backs. A Christian named Jim got Sun Lee's family some food, and some temporary housing. Jim even got Sun Lee a job.

Jim hoped to share his faith with Sun Lee, but Sun Lee didn't know English. After several weeks Jim thought he would give it a try. He explained to Sun Lee about God's love, and what Jesus did on the cross...

Sun Lee looked perplexed. Jim knew his friend could grasp maybe a third of what he said. He was about to give up when Sun Lee blurted out, "If your God like you, Sun Lee want to know him." Jim's *witnessing* was effective because he'd *been a witness!* Be a witness, and you'll never lack an opportunity to share your faith!

It's interesting, in our text the Greek work translated "*witnesses*" is the root of our English word, "*martyr*."

We think of a martyr as a person who lays down his or her life for the cause of Jesus. But before you can *die for Jesus* you first have to be willing to *live for Him*.

A true martyr lays down His life in multiple ways.

I'll never forget April 20, 1999. It was for my generation a watershed moment in American history.

Two gunmen stormed into Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, and went on a killing spree. The horror unfolded on television before our very eyes.

When reports were released about the attack and its motivation it sent chill bumps up and down my spine.

Several students were targeted for no other reason than their faith in Jesus. Suddenly, I realized it's not just the Christian in a communist-controlled or Muslim country that can be killed for their faith. *It can happen right here in America!* Columbine was a wake-up call.

It should've alerted us that at anytime and anywhere we may be called on to take the ultimate stand.

Often we get lulled into thinking that life is only about work, and school, and Little League in the evening, and barbecues on Saturday, and even church on Sunday...

But one day a madman in a trench coat may hold a gun to your head as he did to Rachel Scott.

He literally, reach down, lifted her head by the hair, and asked if she believed in God. Rachel said "Yes," and it cost her, her life... *What would you have said?*

Let's get real - *if we can't muster the courage to live for Jesus now, how will we die for Him then?*

God calls us to be martyrs - or "**witnesses.**" Let's stand for Jesus - *willing to die for Him - or willing to live for Him!* Both attitudes are really one in the same...

Darrell Scott, Rachel's dad, says his daughter had shared her faith with her assailant weeks earlier...

Rachel was more than a martyr. She was a witness.

When Darrell speaks to crowds he quotes a prayer Rachel wrote in her journal, "I want heads to turn in the halls when I walk by. I want them to stare at me, watching and wanting the light you put in me. I want you to overflow my cup with your Spirit... I want you to use me to reach the unreached." *And*

God has answered her prayer! Her testimony still touches lives.

We assume heroes and cowards are made in the moment of crisis - but not so. A desperate situation is only an opportunity for what you already are to surface.

A crisis doesn't produce *a champion* or *a chicken* - it simple reveals who's who. It's said, "[Christians are like tea bags you learn what's inside when they're placed in hot water.](#)" That's why we need to prepare for the crisis ahead of time. Tomorrow's decision is made today.

Let's start now taking the steps that cause us to muscle up and grow strong in our faith. When we first come to Jesus we're babes - *but don't stay that way!*

The Bible is clear, there are no playpens, pacifiers, or teething toys in heaven. Between *coming to Jesus* and *going to heaven* we're suppose to grow up!

Once, a group of tourists were driving through the European countryside. This group had taken a particular interest in the hometowns of famous people.

As they entered one village a tourist shouted out of the bus, and asked a local, "[Were any great men born in your village?](#)" The guy replied, "[Nope, only babies.](#)"

Faith-filled men and women are not born - they're grown. And spiritual growth isn't quantum physics - it's easily explainable. The keys to growing spiritually also haven't changed in the last 2000 years... *Study and apply God's Word - pray and worship daily - move out of your comfort*

zone and take a step of faith - obey the Spirit's promptings - make a commitment to a church - serve the Lord and hang out with other believers...

You don't grow by accident. It's the result of making right choices. A youth group had their motto painted on the wall of their room, "**Keep the faith, baby; not the baby faith.**" *I like it!* It's time for us to **stand** for Jesus!

And it's also time to **march!**

Jesus' plan for His Church is to get *down on our knees* - and *up on our feet* - then *out on the move!*

There's a big world out there, and many of the people who occupy it are lost without the love of God.

They need to be persuaded to come to Jesus. We need to get outside our comfort zone and make a dent!

Notice in our text Jesus tells His followers to move out in expanding spheres: "**Jerusalem, and to all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.**"

Think of our Jerusalem as our family and friends.

Our Judea as our subdivision, or even cul-de-sac.

Our Samaria as Gwinnett county and metro Atlanta.

And the ends of the earth - well, that's *the ends of the earth.*

Let's have an ever-broadening influence.

Don't stop praying for your spouse - or your prodigal child. That's your **Jerusalem**... Bake a pie, or do a kind deed for a neighborhood friend - love your **Judea**.

Let's pray, give, care, and serve - and make Calvary CSM the best church it can be to reach our **Samaria**.

And with a growing and healthy church who knows what impact we can have on **the ends of the earth.**

I have a neighbor across the street. Not long ago the paramedics paid him a visit. They rushed him to the hospital. Turns out it wasn't so serious. He'd been hit with a bout of vertigo. *But it put him on his back...*

I knew he'd be laid up for a few weeks, so I decided to mow his lawn. Realize, my neighbor is an independent chap. I would be taking a chance by helping him out. My plan was to mow his lawn while he was gone, *but before I finished his car pulled up.*

When he asked me what I was doing, I told him, **"I was mowing my yard, spending time with Jesus - and when Jesus walked across the street into your yard, I followed Him."** *I figured he couldn't argue with that...*

I'm still praying for my neighbor. I'm hoping an act of kindness will open up a door to lead him to Jesus.

Let's all reach our Jerusalem and Judea...

Together let's impact our Samaria...

And ultimately, let's reach our world.

In Gwinnett County the immigrant population is exploding. God is bringing the world to us. We need to be looking for ways to share the Gospel with *our world.*

During WW2, prisoners at a Nazi concentration camp were forced to convert waste products into synthetic alcohol - a fuel additive. When the Allies bombed the camp, the Nazis punished the inmates.

They forced them to load all the rubble from the air-raid and pile it up at one end of a field. When the prisoners finished the task, the guards ordered them to carry it back to the other end of the field. This went back and forth - for week after boring week - until all the prisoners began to crack-up under the strain.

Some tried to escape and were killed... Others electrocuted themselves by jumping into the high-voltage fence that surrounded the camp... A few went insane... It was said of their plight, "Because their work made no sense their lives had no meaning."

This is the problem with people today. Life is empty and meaningless because they have no real purpose.

They go to work to make money... so they can buy a home... where they can rest... so they can get up the next morning and go to work... to make money... so they can pay for their home. The cycle gets repeated over and over for a lifetime. And people ask, **what's the point to it all?** Where's the over-arching purpose?

That kind of life is an exercise in futility. In essence, you're moving a pile of worthless rubble from one end of the field to the other... and for no good reason...

It reminds me of the executive who was climbing the corporate ladder. But when he got to the top he was still depressed. He moaned, "I've spent my life climbing a ladder that was leaning against the wrong wall."

This morning the Holy Spirit wants to enroll you in a cause with real teeth. Jesus wants your life to count for eternity. *Are you **kneeling, standing, and marching?***

We live in unparalleled times - in thrilling times. I do believe Jesus is coming back soon. We may actually be in the last two minutes of the fourth quarter. We may be in stoppage time - the game is virtually over...

But in *the meantime* there's work to be done! We can influence people for all eternity. We can introduce them to their Creator, and build His Kingdom in their heart!

Can you think of a more worthwhile enterprise?

Let me close with an imagined account of the dialogue between Jesus and an angel right after He had returned to heaven. When Jesus sat down at the right hand of God, the angel asked Him, *"Did you finish your mission?"* Jesus replied, *"Yes, all that needed to be done has been finished. The world can be saved."*

The angel asked again, *"Has all the world heard the Good News?"* Jesus said, *"No. I left that responsibility to My disciples."* The angel knew these disciples - their frailty and unreliability. He scratched his head and said, *"What if they fail? What's Your contingency plan?"*

Jesus answered him, **"I have no other plan!"**

A lot has changed over the last 2000 years, but one thing hasn't - **God's plan for reaching the lost world with His love and truth.** *He reaches out through us...*

The book of Acts starts out with a room-full of frightened followers... but these people go out *kneeling*, and *standing*,

and *marching* - on their knees, and on their feet, and on the move - and God uses these very first followers to shake their world. He wants to use us the same way - and He will, if we'll trust Him!

Let's **kneel** and pray for the Holy Spirit's power. Let's take a **stand** for Jesus regardless of the cost. And let's **march** into Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and even to the end of the earth, and let our light shine for Jesus.

This is the Lord's plan... It's **a plan that works!**

Today we're having communion... And as you come we'll have people here in the altar to pray with you...

To be filled with the Holy Spirit...

Or to dedicate your life to Jesus...

Or to ask for fresh marching orders...