



Sermon Transcript September 24, 2017

Living Sent Lives God Sent His Spirit Luke 24:36-49

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on September 24, 2017 at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Dr. Scott W. Solberg. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio copy of the sermon on CD is available by request at (860) 563-8286. An audio version of this sermon may also be found on the church website at www.wethefc.com.

Sermon Text
Luke 24:36-49

³⁶ As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, "Peace to you!" ³⁷ But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. ³⁸ And he said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?" ³⁹ See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." ⁴⁰ And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. ⁴¹ And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" ⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³ and he took it and ate before them.

⁴⁴ Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, ⁴⁶ and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, ⁴⁷ and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."

Introduction

We began a conversation last Sunday about what it means for us to live as a people who are sent. I think John 17:18 could serve as a theme verse for this series. Here Jesus prays to the Father, *“As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.”* Who is the *“them”* Jesus has sent into the world? He is not just talking about the twelve disciples here. In verse 20 he says, *“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word.”* That is you and me. Jesus was praying for you and for me and for those who are yet to believe. We have been “sent.”

That helps us understand what it means to be a people who are “sent.” This is not a word reserved for those who go on a missions trip. Nor, is this a word limited to those who go as missionaries. Missions involves those who go and those who send and support. Both are important and this church has had a strong history in supporting missionaries. We have a robust missions budget of \$172,000 that supports the work of missions all over the world. I would encourage you that when you give your regular offering that you designate a portion of it to missions. If you split your offering by giving 80% to General and 20% to Missions you would be representing the difference in the size between the two budgets and you would be supporting both the work here at WEFC and the work of Missions. That being said . . . when you think of missions, who are the “sent ones?” Sometimes I think we take on the mindset that the missionaries are those who are “sent” and we who stay behind are the “senders.” But that is not the case. We are all “sent.” Wherever God has you, that is where God has sent you.

So the question we are asking through this series is simply, “how do we live as a people who have been sent?” On one hand, that is a corporate question to ask as a church that has been “sent” to this community. How as a church do we live “sent lives” in this community where God has placed us? Ironically, one of the ways we live “sent” lives in this community is by doing what we are doing right now. As we gather, we are a presence in this community. But we also need to “scatter” together as well. That is also true of us individually too. Wherever our lives take us from here into our week, how do we live as individuals who are “sent?”

We started answering that question last week. Like Jesus who was sent, we seek to “pitch our tent” among people. In other words, we see ourselves intentionally planted where we are so that we can touch others with the love of Christ. Then in those places where God has us, like Jesus we seek to give “grace upon grace.” Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount that we shine the light of God when we do good works. If at the heart of who

God is, God is love, then if there is anything we ought to be known for it is our love. In doing so, we make God known wherever we happen to go. I asked you to consider two prayers last week as you seek to live sent lives. “God, where are you at work here?” And, “How can I participate with what you are doing?” These prayers help you to be intentional and to think through how to show the love of God wherever he has you.

Now this morning we are going to add to our understanding of how to live as a people who are sent. Last week we acknowledged that God is a sending God and he demonstrated that by sending his Son. This morning we see that God is a sending God in that he sent the Holy Spirit. Jesus says at the end of our passage this morning, “*And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.*” That is a great statement of encouragement. Wherever God takes you, it is good to know that “*you are clothed with power from on high.*” We say it this way in our Way of Life, “I will live with the conviction that God is at work in and through my life, whether I see it or not.” And so as we seek to live as those who are sent, we ought to learn how to be confident that God is at work.

This is a timely reminder for us, because living in this secular culture, I don’t think “power” is what we feel when we are engaging people in our secular culture. Tim Keller defines the spirit of this “secular age” as “one in which all the emphasis is on the here and now, without any concept of the eternal. Meaning in life, guidance, and happiness are understood and sought in present-time economic prosperity, material comfort, and emotional fulfillment.”¹ I saw a video this week of Keller and Russell Moore commiserating at how different it is to evangelize in our western context. They identified three things that make it difficult. First of all, there is no anxiety about sin. It is kind of a lost concept in our culture. And so even the question of where will you go after you die isn’t even a question at the forefront of the mind of our culture. It is possible we are asking questions people aren’t even asking. Secondly, we are not just living in a secular culture, but a “post-Christian secular culture.” So some of the conclusions people are coming to are reactions to the failings of the church. That makes it more challenging for us as we live as those who are sent. And then finally, the secular person in the West feels that their way of thinking is universal. In other words, rational thinking people will come to see the world the way they see the world.² However, what they fail to see is that their view of life is also filled with statements of belief. And so this is where we are “sent” and as we observe the current of culture it takes everything within us to not be swept up with it, let alone come into it with a measure of “power from on high” and have impact for Christ.

And yet, don't underestimate what the Holy Spirit can do through you. I think of Eric Metaxas, who has stepped into the shoes vacated by the death of Chuck Colson. He is an intellect and an Ivy-league graduate. At his first job out of college he worked with a simple man who had a strong and quiet faith. Metaxas had some God orientation in his past, but at the time he was into eastern thought about the conscious and the subconscious. This thought was far from a biblical worldview. One day he came to work and shared with this co-worker the news of one of his family members who was seriously sick. This simple man asked Metaxas a simple question that began the process of his journey to Christ. He just simply asked, "Can I pray for you?" He put his hand on Eric Metaxas and prayed for him. Metaxas said, no one ever had done that with him before and it awoke something within him that eventually drew him to Christ.

I think of Nabeel Qureshi, born and raised in a devout Muslim family. He went off to college at Old Dominion University and quickly became best friends with a fellow student by the name of David Wood. David was a devout Christian and Nabeel a devout Muslim. They challenged each other to consider the arguments of their particular faith and at the same time this odd couple became deep genuine friends. Over a five year period of time, as each objection was answered, Nabeel eventually gave his life to Jesus Christ. He was brought on by Ravi Zacharias and became an effective apologist for the Christian faith. His untimely death to cancer last week at the age of 34 was hard to hear. And yet, because a college student who lived as one who was "sent" there will be fruit to reap for generations to come because of Nabeel's testimony.

What is the point? As we begin to look at our text this morning, I want us to enter into this passage with the reassurance that because the Holy Spirit has been sent, we have been "*clothed with power from on high.*" Are there challenges? Sure. Will you always see the fruit? You may not see fruit right away or ever. But is the Spirit of God at work through you. Don't ever doubt it. In light of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, Paul encourages us in 1 Corinthians 15:58 with these words, "*Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.*" As we endeavor to live sent lives we do so with great confidence . . . even here in New England.

What is it from this passage that gives us this confidence? I want to suggest three things about the Holy Spirit that should encourage you as you seek to live sent lives. I want to look at the work of the Holy Spirit in connection to the resurrection of Jesus. I want us to be reminded of the word of the Holy Spirit and the role of Scripture. And then, I want us to consider the witness of the Spirit through us. Work—Word—Witness.

The Work of the Spirit - Resurrection Power

The context of our passage this morning is the story of the resurrected Jesus appearing for the first time to his disciples. In our text we find them huddled together and talking about the news that had been trickling in from different people who claimed they saw the risen Jesus. One of the reports came from the two men whom Jesus encountered along the road as they were heading home to Emmaus. While walking on the road, they didn't recognize Jesus, but when he went into their home and broke bread with them, he vanished, and their eyes were opened. So they ran to tell the disciples. Of course the disciples had already heard the report from some of the women who had gone to the tomb early that morning and they were the first to encounter the resurrected Jesus. Then Peter and John ran to check the tomb for themselves, and they too reported that it was empty. So while they are *"talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, 'Peace to you!'"*

I love how Luke describes their reaction to the risen Jesus standing right in their presence. Starting in verse 37 it says, *"But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. And he said to them, 'Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.'"* And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, *"Have you anything here to eat?"* They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate before them." In verse 41 you can see them trying to compute what they see with their eyes when Luke writes, *"and while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling."* How can this be? Dead people don't come back to life. But here is Jesus standing in front of them, inviting them to touch him and eating food in their presence. What we discover here is that what man cannot do, the Spirit of God can do. The Spirit of God can bring life from death. This is the work of the Holy Spirit.

On one hand, when we live sent lives, we have confidence because our faith is anchored in a person and in an event marked in history. Everything we believe hinges on the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. If Jesus didn't rise from the dead, we have no faith. There is no way you can explain the inception of the church and the growth of the church apart from the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. This was the message of the early church and the resurrection of Jesus from the dead assures us that our sins can be forgiven. That is why Jesus greets his disciples with the greeting, *"Peace to you!"* In the Gospel of Luke, the word "peace" is synonymous with the idea of "salvation."³ In other words, because Jesus rose from the dead, we know that salvation has come and that we

now have peace with God. And so he greets them with this phrase, *“Peace to you!”*

But it is not just the event of the resurrection of Jesus that gives us confidence to live sent lives. It is also the recognition that the Holy Spirit was involved in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. In Romans 1:4 we learn that Jesus *“was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit.”* While Jesus was the divine Son of God, he did what he did in the power of the Holy Spirit. He began his earthly ministry at this baptism, when the Spirit of God descended upon him like a dove. When Jesus identified himself in Luke 4 as the promised Messiah in the synagogue, he read from the prophet Isaiah, *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.”*

Luke wrote the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts. At the beginning of the Gospel of Luke, we see the Holy Spirit fall on the promised Messiah. At the beginning of the book of Acts, we see the Holy Spirit fall on the disciples. Roger Stronstad said of this, “The Pentecost narrative [in Acts 2] is the story of the transfer of the charismatic Spirit from Jesus to the disciples. In other words, having become the exclusive bearer of the Holy Spirit at his baptism, Jesus becomes the giver of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.”⁴ It is interesting that in John’s gospel when he describes the resurrected Jesus appearing to his disciples, after pronouncing peace, it says in John 20:22, *“he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’”* The point is simply this. The same Spirit that brought Jesus from the dead is at work in and through us. Paul said in Ephesians 1:19-20 that the power at work in us is *“according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead.”* In other words, through the work of the Holy Spirit, God is still bringing to life those who are dead in their sin.

I was sitting in a circle with ten pastors the other week and we shared our stories. Half of us grew up in Christian homes and the other half didn’t. The man sitting to my left came to faith as an adult at a church in Philadelphia, a church I knew well. Another one came to faith through a college campus ministry in New Hampshire. Another came to faith in the city of Springfield and another in the city of Hartford. Don’t tell me that the Spirit of God is not at work in this world! We should live sent lives with such great confidence because the Spirit of God is at work and he is bringing to life those who are spiritually dead. Oh we of little faith! May we not forget that what man cannot do, the Spirit of God can do. So “pitch your tent” with assurance. Give grace upon grace to those in your life who need to see what God is like. And be assured that the same power that brought Jesus from the dead, that same Holy Spirit, is accomplishing the work that brings about the peace of Christ to a heart that embraces the crucified and risen Savior.

The Word of the Spirit - Open Eyes

The second thing that ought to give us confidence about being sent is that we have all we need to live as people who are sent. We have the Scriptures. We have the very Word of God. The Holy Scriptures is the work of the Spirit of God. When you put the Old Testament and the New Testament together, you have one unified story. And yet it was written by 40 different authors over a period of 1400 years. The reason this is so is because of what Peter says 2 Peter 1:21, *“For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”*

It is interesting that Jesus turns to the Scriptures to validate his resurrection. He says in verse 44, *“These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”* “The Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms” is a summary title for the entire Old Testament. In fact, in verse 46 Jesus says that in the Old Testament *“it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.”* So here you have the resurrected Jesus standing in front of his disciples, and yet it is to the Scriptures that Jesus goes to demonstrate the truth of God. It reminds me of the story Jesus told of a poor beggar named Lazarus and the rich man who both die. The rich man ends up in torment, while Lazarus *“was carried by the angels.”* The rich man cries out for mercy and asks that Lazarus be sent from the dead to warn his brothers (kind of like Jacob Marley was sent to Scrooge in *The Christmas Carol*.) The response to this prayer is fascinating and it speaks to the power of the Word of God. It is simply this, *“If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.”*

We need to be confident in the Word of God, even in this secular age. I am afraid that sometimes we feel that the Word of God does not relate to this secular world and so we are shy to proclaim it. And yet, do you know what is interesting? Much to the surprise of the West, according to a recent Pew Research study, *“The world is expected to become more religious—not less.”*⁵ Do you know why? Secularism and science can’t explain the immaterial substance of man and where morality comes from. Science can’t explain why people have this intuitive sense of the transcendent, that there is something bigger than themselves out there and that knowing what that is impacts how we treat others. So in the Scriptures you have this cohesive worldview that is able to respond to these deep questions of life and it gives an answer to what people are sensing is missing in their understanding of life. I am not saying that there is no place for science and reason.

They do contribute great good to our society. But apart from God, they cannot fully answer the deep questions of life nor do they allow for a compelling moral order to life. So don't be afraid to have confidence in the Word of God. It is sufficient and it is able, through the power of the Spirit, to penetrate the heart of man.

I would have loved to been in that room when the risen Jesus opened up the Scriptures to them. More than witnessing any miracle, that is the scene I would have loved to witness. I would have loved to sit in on that "impromptu lecture" where Jesus put all the pieces of the Old Testament together to show how they pointed to Jesus. And to have as your teacher, the risen Savior teaching the class. And yet, I find it fascinating that in spite of the fact that the risen Jesus was standing there, it says in verse 45, "*Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.*" There still was the need for the work of the Spirit of God to open their eyes to receive the Word of God shared with them.

This ought to encourage us as we live sent lives. I said the other week that all we are being asked to do is "drop our nets." It is the work of the Spirit of God that fills them. This does not mean that God doesn't use people or dreams. I knew a guy in seminary who while at Penn State was at a point of crisis and he cried out, "God if you are real show yourself to me." When he finished the prayer, there was a knock on the door from a campus ministry asking if he could share some things with this young man. But he still opened up the Scriptures. Even Nabeel Quereshi, over the span of four years he diligently sought the Scriptures and became convinced that they were true but the cost of following Jesus was heavy upon his heart. And so through a series of three dreams, he was carried to a point of faith. So God uses those things. In our text we have the resurrected Jesus opening up the Scriptures and yet they still needed the work of the Spirit to give them understanding. So take confidence in the power of the Word of God and pray for the Spirit to open up the hearts of people. I have seen it happen right before my eyes through preaching. We have what we need in the Word and the Spirit.

The Witness of the Spirit - Breathe on Us

Finally, there is the witness of the Spirit. At this point Jesus says to them, "*You are witnesses of these things.*" Of what things? Well namely "*that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.*" And to this end, we too are sent. But don't miss the fact that they were told to wait for the promised Holy Spirit. Jesus said to them, "*And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.*"

I like the way Ross Hastings puts it. He says that we ought to be “a community fraught with the Spirit’s breath.”⁶ What does that mean? It means that we ought to invoke the Spirit’s presence asking to be filled with the Spirit. We ought to be shaped by the Word of God in the power of the Spirit. The gifts of the Spirit ought to be expressed among us. The Fruit of the Spirit, namely love, ought to mark us. We ought to seek the direction of the Spirit as we seek to discern how and where we are led to reach out. In other words, apart from relying on the Holy Spirit we can do nothing. Leslie Newbigin said it this way, “Mission is not just something that the church does; it is something that is done by the Spirit, who is himself the witness, who changes the world and the church, who always goes before the church in its missionary journey.”⁷

Often when we think of the word “witness” we think of an activity we are called to do. And that is part of it. But for this sermon, I want us to see the word “witness” more as something that we are already are. We are witnesses because we have been baptized by the Spirit and so he nudges us and gives us a restless and missional spirit. As we come under the Word of God, the Spirit of God shapes our lives and we become a witness. As we pray for the filling of the Spirit and as we begin to see the Fruit of the Spirit, the love of God shining through us, we become a witness. When we use our gifts to serve each other, we become a witness. As God stirs our hearts to reach beyond ourselves to reach others with the love of Jesus, we become a witness.

As we move forward in this series, you will be encourage to “give witness.” But this morning, I want you to embrace what you already are in Christ. You are a witness because the Spirit of God is at work in you and in us. The promise of the Father has come. We have been clothed with power on high. So our prayer is, “Breathe on us, Holy fire fall. Come and fill this place with your presence.”

Conclusion

Living as sent people this week, let us live into the reality that the promise of the Father has been sent and that we are clothed with power on high. Be confident, the Spirit of God is at work and he is bringing life from death. The Word of the Spirit is sufficient and so don’t be afraid to share it. The witness of the Spirit is sure. It is not just what we do. It is who we already are. May we be a community fraught with the Spirit’s breath and may he give us a restless missional spirit that is not satisfied because many around us still need Jesus. Breathe on us Spirit of God! Stir in us. Make us restless. Compel us to be the witness that we already are. And fill us with confidence in the work, the word and the witness of the might Spirit of God.

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- ¹Tim Keller *Making Sense of God* (New York: Penguin Books, 2016) 2
- ²Tim Keller, Russell Moore and Colin Hanson “How Sharing the Gospel in Our Secular Age is Different” www.thegoaspelcoalition.org September 19, 2017
- ³Joel B. Green *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) 854
- ⁴Roger Stronstad *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012) 55
- ⁵Keller , 9
- ⁶Ross Hastings *Missional God, Missional Church* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2012) Kindle Location 3250
- ⁷Leslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, rev. ed (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) 56

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COMMUNITY GROUPS

Getting To Know Me Questions

1. Share with the group one thing from the past week that you would like them to know.
2. Report on how you are doing with your “next step of obedience.” How would you like other to pray for you?
3. Share one insight you gained from the sermon.

Diving Into The Word

4. Read 1 Corinthians 15:58 and discuss what might discourage you from living “sent lives” in our western culture. What encouragement do you find in this verse?
5. Read the prayer of Ephesians 1:15-22. Pay special attention to verses 19-20 and share ways you have seen the power of God on display in your own story. How does this promise encourage you to live as one who is sent?
6. Read Luke 24:44-47 and discuss the core content of the gospel found in verses 46-47. What parts of the gospel do you feel are difficult for our culture to embrace? Why do you think that is the case?
7. Read Luke 24:48-49 and identify what is already true of us. How does this encourage you as you seek to live a life that is sent.

Taking It Home

8. When it comes to living as someone who is sent, where do you need to grow in confidence?
9. Identify one area in your life where you want to be more of an intentional presence for Christ and how would you like the group to pray for you.