



UPCOMING DATES ...

Young Families Birthday Bash – 17 September
Choctoberfest – 4 & 5 October
GNI – 13 October
Young Families Birthday Bash – 22 October
Women's Encounter – 3-5 November
Man Church -7 November
Start In – Mondays 7.30pm & Sunday 4pm
Kids "Blast" (Kindy to Yr6) – Sundays Nights
Image Recovery – Every Thursday Night

2017 – CG Notes #24

STRONGER – Sharing Your Faith

Title: Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth

Our year - long theme is strength to strength and this month we will learn how we can become stronger as individuals and stronger as a church when we follow the command of Jesus to share our faith in Him.

The baptism of the Holy Spirit provides us with the power to make the good news of Jesus Christ known to our world. He makes us strong in the Spirit and in the power of His might.

He provides us with *His* power for *our* service, particularly as we seek to advance His Kingdom in the earth.

Ephesians 6: 10 HCSB

Finally, be strengthened by the Lord and by His vast strength.

After Jesus' resurrection and before He ascended into heaven, He remained on the earth for forty days. He met with His disciples on a number of occasions over that course of time. Imagine if you had that privilege, sat and shared a meal with the resurrected Saviour? What might you have been thinking? It's interesting to note *what they were* thinking – it seems they did not as yet grasp what Christ's Kingdom is all about.

Acts 1:3-8 NLT

*³ During the forty days after he suffered and died, he appeared to the apostles from time to time, and he proved to them in many ways that he was actually alive. And **he talked to them about the Kingdom of God.***

*⁴ Once when he was eating with them, he commanded them, “Do not leave Jerusalem until **the Father sends you the gift he promised**, as I told you before.⁵ John baptized with water, but in just a few days you will be baptized with the **Holy Spirit**.”*

⁶ So when the apostles were with Jesus, they kept asking him, “Lord, has the time come for you to free Israel and restore our kingdom?”

*⁷ He replied, “The Father alone has the authority to set those dates and times, and they are not for you to know. ⁸ **But 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.”*

The disciples were focussed on the restoration of Israel and upon an earthly kingdom being established. Jesus had plainly said that his Kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36) but this was a concept the disciples were yet to lay hold of. Earlier, they had gone so far as to participate in heated discussions about who would be the greatest and who sit at Jesus' right hand and who would sit on the left. (Luke 9:46, Mark 10:37) What they didn't yet understand was that none of those things mattered. They were about to be entrusted with the greatest news the world would ever know and they would soon experience being filled with the very power of God Himself.

Discuss:

We have to try and understand that they didn't understand!

- Discuss the human tendency to not see the big picture – the big plan of God.
- Why is it we lean towards concerns for the immediate situation or the things that benefit ourselves?
- How can we help ourselves to see beyond ourselves? What could we do differently?

You shall receive power

There is no greater or better source of strength than the Holy Spirit Himself.

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you.”

And the next sentence: “*And you will be my witnesses ...*” is directly related to the purpose for His power. We love the Holy Spirit and all that He does for us but His *most important work* is what He does *through us*. “My witnesses” is what Jesus said.

What is a witness?

In the Greek New Testament, this is the word *martyis* that means: a witness as in a legal sense or a historical sense, e.g. “I was there and I saw what happened.”

The events of the book of Acts however, and early Christian history actually changed the meaning and usage of the word, *martyis* as it was brought into the English language. A “martyr” is someone who proves the strength and genuineness of their faith in Christ by willingly suffering death. This was depth of faith and genuine commitment that so many of the early church demonstrated and continues to be shown in many places on the earth today.

Where ever we may have the opportunity to share the Gospel be it in easy circumstances or the most difficult we can be certain that we require the power of the Holy Spirit to help us confidently, even boldly speak as a witness of Jesus Christ.

Discuss:

- How does the Holy Spirit help us to be confident witnesses for Him?
- In what ways does He come to our assistance?
- Share an experience when you know the Holy Spirit helped you.

Everyone Everywhere

“But 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.”

We have to consider what “everywhere” meant to these First Century Jewish believers. Think first of their location when Jesus spoke these words. They were in Jerusalem. Not long after that, the Holy Spirit came upon the 120 gathered to wait for the promised Holy Spirit. It was an astounding event and the whole city knew about it. So Jerusalem – OK, got it. Judea – a little further afield – other towns and cities near Jerusalem such as Bethlehem, down to Jericho, the Judean desert and so forth. Then there was Samaria to the North and to the people of mixed race and religion – a bit harder to grasp and finally “to the ends of the earth.”

For the First Century believer they would not have known just how big the earth is and just how far away “the ends of the earth” are. If you look at a globe of the earth and begin at Jerusalem then spin the globe around you will discover that we in Australia are about as far away from Jerusalem as you can get! In that sense, we are the ends of the earth. Aren’t you glad that the Gospel got to you and me?

Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth held significant meaning for the early believers and it does for us as well today.

Discuss:

These four regions correspond to modern day comparisons for us. Discuss how that the Holy Spirit will send us and empower us to be a witness for Him in all of these “regions” at one time or another.

Jerusalem Where I live right now. Home. My family and extended family. My neighbourhood. The place where I am known best.

What particular challenges might we have when sharing our faith in our personal Jerusalem?

Judea A bit further out. Not totally out of your comfort zone but not totally familiar either. This might be at the job, someone you meet at the shops, sports team, etc.

Share an experience when you sensed the Holy Spirit directing you to speak to someone you don’t know that well. What happened?

Samaria The Samaritans and the Judeans were at odds. Both held less than flattering opinions of each other. “You Jews say ... but we say ...” the Samaritan woman at the well said to Jesus. (John 4)

What is your experience of sharing your faith with someone who is not like yourself – perhaps from another culture?

What commonality could you build a bridge across in order to share Christ?

Luke 10:33(NKJV)

But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion.

The ends of the earth

Matthew 24:14 (NIV)

¹⁴ And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

The preaching of the Gospel to the ends of the earth will be the fulfilment of Christ’s commission and the summation of time.

As a church we seek to live to make Christ’s command our first priority.

What do you feel is your part in seeing this accomplished?