

2015 Global Ministry Conference  
*Faith Promise Sunday*  
“God’s Unchanging Word to a Changing World”  
Acts 1:4–8  
Dr. Harry L. Reeder III  
March 1, 2015 – Morning Sermon

We will start by looking at Acts 1 and then we’ll be looking at a few more passages to help bring this into a simple focus. This is the Word of God. God’s Word is true. Acts 1:4-11 says *[4] And 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; [5] for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”*

*[6] So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” [7] He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. [8] But 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.” [9] And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. [10] And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, [11] and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”*

The grass withers, the flower fades, God’s Word abides forever, and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

I have one simple thing to say before we make our faith promise commitments but it is kind of unloaded from a couple of passages of Scriptures. One piece of this that touches us today is that this church has a mission’s statement that says ‘For God’s glory Briarwood is committed to equipping Christians to worship God and reach Birmingham to reach the world for Christ.’ Part of assisting us to do that, but not all, is a certain rhythm in the seasons of this church. One of them is in the fall of every year as we approach Reformation Sunday in the foundation of the Word of God in which this congregation is built we take time to do a National Mission’s Conference. We highlight for that week is we focus on reaching Birmingham, Alabama and North America. We come out of that conference with our ministry theme for the next year in our Every Member Commitment season where the members of this church communicate to the elders and deacons the tithes that God has entrusted to them to bring in worship.

From that the elders and deacons put together a budget that leads us towards fifty percent of everything that comes to Briarwood will leave Briarwood for the work of the Kingdom from Birmingham, to Alabama, to North America and to the world. That leads us into our celebration of Advent, the new ministry theme for the new year and then that brings us to our mission’s conference. That is the kind of the rhythm of our congregation. This mission’s conference is focused on reaching our nations for the world. We come out of this conference with our faith promise commitments which are one hundred percent devoted to sending the Gospel to the nations of the world.

This year is a special year for us because it is a jubilee year for us. It is our 50<sup>th</sup> mission's conference in the life of this 65 year old church. Missions started before that but we have been doing mission's conferences to bring intentionality to it and embrace faith promise giving for these last 50 years. God has done some very extraordinary things to us, in us, from us and through us and for that we give Him praise, glory and honor.

I'm actually from the denomination that gave some legs to the faith promise and it was the Christian Missionary Alliance Church, where I was raised in as a kid. I was fully aware of faith promise early on as a child and I was so glad my parents taught it to me on a yearly basis. I like to share the three steps that my wife and I take to decide our faith promise and I do this in a discipling way as a pastor. Step one is beyond the tithe we ask 'what is it that God is giving to us that we can give as our first offering?' Faith promise is much more than financial resources. It is 'God I want to give You my children and You can call them to do what You want them to do.' As I look back over this past 50 years this faith promise has allowed us to do so much and to know the joy of the Lord and fulfilling the Great Commission. Hundreds of our members' sons and daughters have and are being sent out to the mission field. Innumerable hours of intercessory prayer for world evangelism, has gone out. There are a number of ways you can be involved in our missions even if God is not calling you out in the field.

You can develop a strategic prayer plan to pray for one missionary or all 200 missionaries. We're just going to trust the Lord to do this whole thing by the way He leads you to pray, to use your spiritual gifts and to engage financially. Maybe God is leading you to be one of those sons and daughters that are out serving the world in nations all over the world. God has allowed this church to send Gospel evangelists, disciplers, church planters, revitalization pastors and leadership mobilization with Gospel deeds of love, mercy and justice to 45 percent of the nations that make up this world. One of the mechanisms is through this faith promise giving. Lord, by faith, You will give this to me and I promise myself, my abilities, my children, my resources and finances to give back to You.

My wife and I use this three S strategy – systematically, sacrificially and supernaturally. As I look back and see how God has brought resources He seemed to do it through the systematic, sacrificial and supernaturally enhanced giving of His people. Systematically we pray 'Lord, this year what we give regularly beyond our tithe for faith promise for we believe You'll enable us to do this.' Secondly, 'Lord, sacrificially what is it that we can sacrifice this year that would be dear to us' and by the way we are just sacrificing what He gave to us and we're going to use it for world missions. Then thirdly we would pray to give something supernaturally. Have you ever wondered how the people were able to build a tabernacle of such majesty of gold, silver and purple in the middle of a desert? Where did they get that in a desert? It is what the Bible calls the plunder of the Egyptians. So God provides all of that supernaturally. What do you believe that God will bring to you and your family supernaturally that will go back through you to His work? By faith, I promise.

Why is it that Briarwood makes this kind of commitment? I embrace this and I believe it is out of a sanctified self-interest. It is not self-absorption, self-reliance or self-exaltation but just a sanctified self-interest. It is in the context of love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind and love your neighbor as yourself. There is some

sanctified love that I'm supposed to have for myself that is not idolatry but under the rubric of being surrendered to Christ. Or do unto others as you would have them do unto you. There is a sanctified sense as to this is what I'd like to have in my life so that becomes a guide of thinking that others may want me to do that in their life as well. When God's Word is guiding me by grace and I'm pursuing holiness this is what I'd love to happen in my life in the pursuit of holiness and that becomes a guide to sanctified self-interest and becomes a map for me and how I minister to other people.

There is something as to why I believe faith promise is crucial to us that have a sanctified self-interest. I want to go through a couple of passages of Scriptures with you and I hope you capture it like I do and then I'll get back to that sanctified self-interest. The mission's committee gave us this theme; Thy Word to the world. You can take the Word of God to the world and not take Jesus and the Gospel if you don't deal with the Word of God rightly but you cannot take Christ and the Gospel to the world without taking the Word of God to the world.

Jesus Himself substantiated our mission's theme in Luke 24. The Disciples are totally in despair. There were two in the road to Emmaus and the scattered eleven had become frightened. The women were bewildered even though they were the last at the cross and the first at the tomb. Then comes the report that He is risen and they still can't put it all together and then Jesus meets the two on the road to Emmaus. He does a repeat performance to those at the Upper Room after the two on the road get there. Then the Bible says this; He opened their minds to understand the Word of God and beginning with Moses and all the Prophets He explained Himself in all the Scriptures. He showed them that it is written that the Son of God would suffer, die and be raised on the third day. In other words, the Word of God defines the ministry of Christ. What is happening at that cross and the empty tomb? It has already been defined from the Word of God. So you can't take Christ to the world and tell them what He did without the Word of God because it's the Word of God that defines what He did at that moment 2100 years ago.

Secondly, it is the Word of God that defines the message of Christ. It is what we call the Good News of Christ, the Gospel, this unique message that no man-made religion has but we have to proclaim. The Word of God defines what Christ did and is built upon what Christ did. You will proclaim to the nations the forgiveness of sins that comes in Christ. He forgives us of the guilt of sin, frees us from sin and liberates us from the power of sin. As the hymn writer says, the glory of Christ and the double cure, I'm free from its guilt and I'm free from its power. The Gospel did not come by religious philosophers coming up with an idea for it was revealed in the Word of God and this was why Christ did what He did. Notice how Paul says I'm not ashamed of The Gospel and it is something defined in the Word of God and it is singular.

Thirdly, the Word of God defines our mission for Christ. Go and proclaim this message to all the nations and until Jesus comes back that is what we're supposed to do. Who wrote the Gospel of Luke by the power of the Holy Spirit? Luke. As Luke ends his Gospel he now expounds on that ending by going to volume two which is the book of Acts. He expounds on this promise of the Holy Spirit coming upon them where they will receive power and that He will be with them. They can't go until they get that power. In Acts he says they then are now empowered with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is poured out upon them as promised from the Word of God so now they can be His witnesses. The work of the Holy Spirit is not to bring attention to Himself but to give us

the power to bring all the attention to Jesus. Jesus says ‘You will be My witnesses’ so they can take this message to be on mission and in ministry from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the utter most parts of the world.

That becomes Luke’s outline for the book of Acts. In Acts 1 through 8 the Gospel is taken to Jerusalem. Then the Gospel goes to Judea and Samaria in Acts 9 through 12 and the churches there. It goes to Antioch and then to the world in Acts 13-28. The powerful work of the Holy Spirit through the people of God begins to unfold as the Gospel spreads throughout all the world and then Luke ends Acts 28 with a period because the whole thing isn’t ended until Jesus comes back. Jesus will come back when the mission is through and all of His people have been gathered to Himself from all the nations. So that is what He is sending us out to do.

I want you to see a little bit of the journey on this through the book of Acts. In Acts 1 the church is blossoming from 3,000 to 5,000 and people are being saved every day. They haven’t gone to Judea or Samaria because they have not had their first annual mission’s conference yet. God has another way to send them and it’s called persecution. This is something not unknown to the Middle East. He sends the stoning of Stephen in Acts 7. Acts 8:1 says [8] *And Saul approved of his execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.* You are either a mission field or a missionary. So they are converted and left the vocational leaders back in Jerusalem but the persecution scattered the other believers to Judea and Samaria.

What do they do when they go to Judea and Samaria? Acts 8:4 says [4] *Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.* So now they are taking the Gospel to Judea and Samaria. As this happens the Gospel lands in Antioch. Acts 11:19-26 says [19] *Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews.* [20] *But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus.* (The Gospel goes to both Jew and Gentile now.) [21] *And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord.* [22] *The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch.* (They sent one of their best men, Barnabas and as far as we know he was their biggest giver.) [23] *When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose, [24] for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. [25] So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, [26] and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.*

Notice that they didn’t come to Christ and say “I’m a Christian” but they came to Christ, followed Christ and the world said “There are little Jesus’, little Christs.” So it wasn’t their prescription term but it was the world’s description term. Why were they called little Christs? It was because they were being taught the Word had come to them, Christ had been exalted and the Gospel was doing its work. Those people who had been leading it had been sent to them – Barnabas and Saul. Great men from different places were sent and the church takes off growing. Now what happens? Let’s look at Acts 13. So now there is a church in Jerusalem and Antioch.

They have assembled for a worship service. Acts 13:1-3 says [1] *Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.* [2] *While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."* [3] *Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.*

In the context of their worship they have fasted and are praying and there is the gathered leadership team. It is no longer Barnabas and Saul but they've added Simeon, Lucius and Manaen. So there are these five leaders that are there and then the Holy Spirit wants them to send to the world and so they sent Barnabas and Saul, arguably their two best. Jerusalem and Antioch sent their best missionaries and they did this because they didn't send anything that hadn't been given to them first. They were only giving what they had been receiving.

I want you to notice something about these five leaders at the church of Antioch. As far as I can see none of them are indigenous. None of these leaders are from Antioch and the text kind of takes pains to point that out to us. Barnabas came from Jerusalem. Paul/Saul came from Tarsus. Lucius came from Cyrene. Manaen came from the court of Herod the tetrarch and Simeon came from Niger. All of them had been given and Antioch had been receiving. Now the Holy Spirit says we're going to reach the world so send your best two. They didn't give what was left over but they sacrificially, systematically gave what had been supernaturally given to them. The result is found in Acts 17 and it was that they shook the world.

Here is my takeaway. It actually is more blessed to give than to receive and all that we give comes from what we have received. You are just giving what God gave to you. The question is, how is He leading you to participate in this matter of Great Commission. Here is the sanctified self-interest. I want Briarwood to be a living church. Briarwood will not be a living church unless it's a giving church. You'll never live unless you give. Our leadership has taught us that in many ways for 50 years and we celebrate it. Praise the Lord!

I had the privilege to learn it this way. I have just been down in South Florida at a conference and I remember why I liked ministry in South Florida and that's because in February it is 75 degrees. I was there while you all were here in Birmingham making snowmen out of one inch of snow and I'm not sure how you did that but I saw the pictures on Facebook. I remember getting a call from Frank Barker and Terry Geiger from Briarwood in 1989 when I was in South Florida wanting me to go plant a presbytery in North Carolina. I didn't think at first God was calling me to do that but then God called me to do that. I flew to Birmingham and then went to meet with the National Missions Committee who was doing a Bible study at the Copper Kettle. They began interviewing me wanting me to be the first church planter and they would pay my salary at \$25,000 a year for three years. So they made that commitment but didn't make it readily.

One of them on this National Committee said "Do you know what \$75,000 would do on the mission field?" I could just about see my call disappearing at that moment. They were about ready to put all that into world missions. Then Frank spoke up and said "Harry is this church in Charlotte going to do missions?" I said "Yes sir." He said "Are you going to do faith promise giving?" I said "Yes sir." Frank said "Sounds like a good

investment of \$75,000 to me.” It was a unanimous vote and I got to go. They did a study twelve years later at Christ Covenant in Charlotte, North Carolina and not only did I have a chance to plant a presbytery as well as the church but was also able to give something like 11 million dollars and about 80 plus members to the mission field. That was a giving church that helped another church that became a giving church. You’re not a living church unless you’re a giving church.

In a few months I’ll be taking some people to Israel and in one day we’re going to start at Mount Hermon and go the whole length of Israel which will take about eight hours by travel. We’ll start at Mount Hermon where they will be snow skiing and then we’ll come down and see the three head waters of the Jordan River and how they come together and empty into the Sea of Galilee. Then we’ll see it run down the Rift Valley and stop at a place called the Dead Sea which is the lowest point of the earth on land. I will tell them what I’m about to tell you now.

Two thirds of the irrigation of Israel comes from the Sea of Galilee so they have something to drink and eat as it irrigates the crops as well. They have been pulling thousands of fish every year out of that Sea for thousands of years. Then when we get to the Dead Sea I’ll have to tell them not to drink the water or you won’t make it back to the United States. It’s not only dead but it will kill you. There are two seas – one is living and one is dead. The same river goes to both seas. What’s the difference? One sea receives and sends. It’s alive. The other sea only receives. It’s dead.

To be a living church you have to be a giving church but we can’t be a giving church because we have elders and deacons with the right policies. To be a giving church we have to be a giving people. To be a living Christian you have to be a giving Christian and living Christians who are giving Christians make living churches because they are giving churches by God’s grace. Some have asked me if Tom Cheely ever read their faith promise card and I would say ‘no, but I’m not sure about this year.’ We have a great chance to honor the Lord for the legacy of 50 years and encourage a new mission’s pastor until Jesus comes but most of all we just have the opportunity to live. You live when you give. Let’s pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the time we could be together in Your Word. I thank You for the Lord Jesus. You gave Your Son and we have received Him. Now we want to give Him and we who have received the resources will then give the resources. We will go, we will pray. Father, there are some who You are leading to go be pioneer missionaries, some to a missions committee, and I pray that at whatever level You lead us to our resources, financial resources and all of us to intercessory prayer for this is a good moment for us. I thank You in Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Power Point

### THY WORD TO THE WORLD

We can take the Word of God to the World  
and not take Christ and the Gospel to the World but...  
We cannot take Christ and the Gospel to the World  
without taking the Word of God to the World.

- God's Word defines the Ministry of Christ
- God's Word defines the Message of Christ
- God's Word defines the Mission for Christ

#### LIFE TAKEAWAY

It actually is “more blessed to give than to receive” and “all that we give comes from what we have received.”

A LIVING CHURCH IS A GIVING CHURCH