

SUMMONED

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Let me begin with a story. Peter, Christ's apostle, was sitting on the rooftop of Simon's house in Joppa, waiting, as lunch was being prepared. His thoughts turning Godward and his heart turning to prayer, he fell into an unusual trance and had a vision.

In the vision, a large sheet, containing all kinds of animals (both clean and unclean, according to Jewish law), descended from Heaven and was opened before him. A voice from above commanded him to rise and eat. But he objected, for he had never eaten anything deemed unclean. Then, the sheet and its contents were withdrawn.

But it descended again and the command was repeated. Peter repeated his objection, too, asserting his rigid observance of Kosher law. The sheet was withdrawn.

The sheet descended a third time, and again Peter heard the command. He was puzzled by this divine insistence. What could it mean?

As he mused, there came a knock at the door. Three servants of Cornelius, a Roman centurion, had arrived in search of Peter.

The Holy Spirit said to Peter, "Go with them." When he asked what they wanted, they relied, "Our master, Cornelius, was instructed by an angel to summon you." Peter had been served.

When he answered the summons, the work of the Gospel took a major turn and the Kingdom of God made a global impact.

Call to Appear

A summons is a legal writ, calling you to appear before a judge and present your testimony.

Pick up your Bible. Gently tap your neighbor with the Bible and tell him or her, "You've been summoned."

It's a fact. We have all been summoned by what is in that Book.

Now, let me explain what is in the Bible's summons. Let's read together Luke 24:44-49 (NLT):

Then he said, "When I was with you before, I told you that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and in the Psalms must be fulfilled."

Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. And he said, "Yes, it was written long ago that the Messiah would suffer and die and rise from the dead on the third day. It was also written that this message would be proclaimed in the authority of his name to all the nations, beginning in Jerusalem: 'There is forgiveness of sins for all who repent.'

Do you know that these words are true? Even though you have not seen Jesus Christ in the flesh, you believe His words. Then you will recognize that what follows is also true and applicable to you.

"You are witnesses of all these things. And now I will send the Holy Spirit, just as my Father promised. But stay here in the city until the Holy Spirit comes and fills you with power from Heaven."

You are a witness.

And Christ has sent the Holy Spirit to fill you with power from Heaven in order to accomplish your witness effectively.

Consider Jesus' words in John 15:26-27:

"I will send you the Advocate—the Spirit of truth. He will come to you from the Father and will testify all about me. And you must also testify about me because you have been with me from the beginning of my ministry."

The Holy Spirit has come to testify to us about Jesus Christ. Apart from His testimony, what could we know? Only the facts recorded in Scripture, but not the Man behind those facts. It is the Holy Spirit who shows us the things of Christ and makes Him known to us.

Apart from the Holy Spirit's testimony, what could others know? Only the factual words we share with them, but not the Savior behind those words. It is the Holy Spirit who makes Christ real.

He testifies of Christ. But "you also must" testify of Christ. The words are plainly imperative. The Holy Spirit's testimony is minimized or maximized according to our participation in testifying—minimized if we don't, maximized if we do. God *needs* your testimony in the court of your family, friends, and acquaintances.

The Holy Spirit gives us divine power for effective testimony, just as Jesus promised (Acts 1:8).

But you also must testify.

Jesus said, *“Follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people”* (Matthew 4:19). It is fair to ask, if you are not fishing for people, are you truly following Jesus?

Why must we testify to Christ? At least four reasons.

Debt of Love

Because someone testified to us, we owe a debt of love to others. Someone prayed for you, and someone spoke with you about Christ and God’s plan to save you, or you wouldn’t be seated here today. You may not know who prayed, and you may not remember who first spoke with you—in person, via TV or radio, through a song or a church service—but sometime you heard the story and received an invitation to respond. That’s how it works.

And now it’s your turn to pass along the Good News, to pay it forward, to help someone else meet the Savior. You are indebted to the one(s) who shared with you, and you can repay that debt by passing on the Great Story of God’s saving love.

Under Command

Because you’ve been commanded to go and tell others. *“Go into all the world and preach the Good News to everyone.”* (Mark 16:15)

And to assist you in the work and multiply your efforts, the Father has empowered you with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). He will guide you into all truth (John 14:17). He will show you the things of Christ and remind you what Jesus has said (John 14:26). He will show you things to come (John 16:13), so that you can be prepared to respond. He will even give you the very words you are to speak, when the time is right (Mark 13:11).

Others Are Dependent

Because other people depend on you, in order to hear the truth, as Paul wrote to the church in Rome (10:13-15):

“For ‘whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.’ How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!’”

Some people are dependent on you, and only you. Within your circles of relational influence (family, friends, co-workers, acquaintances), you may be the only Christian some people are familiar with, the only one they would grant the privilege of sharing such personal matters. Will you help them?

There is a Heaven to gain and a Hell to shun! But who will tell them that? Their eternal destiny hangs in a balance. They need to know the Way of salvation.

Kingdom Increase

Because it is how the Kingdom of God increases, in number and influence. As people put their trust in Jesus Christ, they are born again into the Family of God. His Kingdom grows one by one (and each is won by one). The number increases incrementally, but significantly, as each one does his or her part. As an example, the Assemblies of God has increased from a few thousand to over 67 million, in just 100 years. That's the result of Spirit-empowered testimony!

What will the next 100 years bring? Only God knows, but you can be a part of it!

Do Right

The ancient Syrians besieged the city of Samaria, producing a great famine—so severe that some people even killed and ate their own children to survive.

Just outside the city gates lived four leprous men, who said to one another, "Why are we sitting here until we die?" Weighing their options they said, "If we go into the city, we will die of famine. If we sit here, we will die of famine. Let's surrender to the Syrians. At least there's a chance they will keep us alive."

But when they approached the Syrian camp, to their amazement, they found it vacant! The tents were left standing, the livestock remained tied to their posts, and food, clothing, weapons, and loot from their campaign of war were all left behind!

The Lord had caused the entire army to hear the sound of an even greater army approaching, so they fled in haste by night, with just the clothes on their backs.

The lepers ate and drank and gathered money and clothing and hid it for themselves.

Then they said, "We are not doing right. This is a day of good news, and we remain silent. Let's go and tell the people of the city."

My dear friends, if we remain silent, after Christ has done so much for us, we, too, are not doing right. This, too, is a day of good news. We need to share it. That's what you do with good news!

Jeremiah lamented, “*Is it nothing to you who pass by?*” (Lamentations 1:12). As you consider the plight and confusion of the unsaved people around you, the awful prospect of eternal condemnation, and increasingly limited access to the Good News message about Jesus Christ, can you continue to just walk on by? Do you dare? Will Christ—who paid such a steep price to save sinners—ignore our reluctance?

I admit, I am confused by many of our American panhandlers. I have been to countries where their culture *forces* many people to beg for a living, because their “kind” is unemployable. That’s not the case here.

In many cases, my heart hardens with cynicism, as I pass by a white, able-bodied person, who holds a cardboard sign that says, “Hungry! Anything will help.” Frankly, I don’t believe the sign.

But my greatest concern is for those who, despite their material advantages, don’t realize they are spiritually impoverished, who don’t even know enough to hold up a sign that says, “Spiritually hungry! Anything will help.” Their plight is *eternal* in nature! And, in fact, “anything” will *not* help. Only the *real* Savior, Jesus Christ, can really help.

I want us all to learn to be generous toward anyone who has fallen on hard times or has fewer material advantages than you do, but I care most about your kindness and generosity toward those who are spiritually starving.

The Kingdom is here now. But the door of grace for salvation will not be open much longer. Jesus will return and the door will be shut. What we will do for Christ must be done soon. The Holy Spirit is testifying today. Will you also testify?

We have been summoned. And we have good reason to respond. Don’t you agree?

Let’s begin right now by committing to pray for someone you know who lives apart from Christ. Pray for their heart to soften and their mind to open. Pray for their spirit’s eyes to see and their ears to hear the Good News. And pray for their heart to trust in the One who alone can save their soul.