



Sharing the Message with the World...

Week 2 – Judea

Check-in...

How are you? Where have you seen Christ working in your life in the last week? And... as Labor Day marks the unofficial end to summer, what was the highlight of your last three months? Were you able to take a trip? Lay by the pool and sip iced tea? Or was there no change, just stifling heat, and you're ready for a pumpkin spiced fall?

Opening Prayer...

God of Embrace, let us gather others to you with confidence, knowing everyone needs to hear of your love.

Introduction...

Jesus is sitting with his disciples in a place called the Mount of Olives, just outside Jerusalem. The last time they were there together, Jesus was betrayed, arrested, tried, convicted, flogged, and executed. (And you thought you had a rough weekend.) As we know, spoiler alert,

Jesus conquers death 3 days later, comes back to life, and begins appearing to his followers. Now, 40-ish days later, they are again in the Mount of Olives and Jesus is going to leave them again... but this time, for good and for a much better reason. He's sending them out to begin a ministry that would change human history. We began talking last week about this Commission and how we, like the disciples, are "Sent" out into the world to tell others about Jesus. But first...

Review: Last week, we talked about "witnessing" in our Jerusalems... our most intimate relationships: partner, family, kids, yourself. How did you live that out this past week? Were you able to have a spiritual conversation with your loved ones? How'd it go?

Scripture...

For the last 40 days, Jesus has been preparing his followers for this mission, teaching and empowering them, knowing the incredible task they would face. The time has come for him to return to heaven. So, he leaves them with a command that will become the foundation of their ministry, and the foundation of our call to share the good news of Jesus Christ with the world.

Read Acts, Chapter 1, verse 8.

(Gold star for anyone who has it memorized.)

Last week we talked about the *why*. A command without a reason doesn't get great results. (Just ask any parent how the line "because I

said so” works out for you.) But a commission with a powerful motivation can change the world. And so, the *why* is simple. Jesus’s followers had come to him with their brokenness, and he had given them life in return. (Read that again. It’s important.) This is our why, as well. We have come to Jesus with our brokenness and have found love and hope and healing. And because our lives have been changed, we are called to share this incredible peace with a hurting world. Then, we ended last week by diving into the *how*. Sharing our faith isn’t easy. It can feel awkward and personal. And so, we started where Jesus told the disciples to start, Jerusalem, witnessing in our homes, to the most intimate sphere of influence we have. Today, we move out a step, and look at Judea.

Question 1: How are you at following instructions or orders? Are you a “good soldier” and do what you’re told without question? Or do you naturally (and perhaps vehemently) reject authority? Or do you land somewhere in the middle, “I’ll do it... I just need a good reason and to be asked nicely”? Does it matter who is giving the instruction or if it matches your vision?

Reflection...

Jesus’s followers landed somewhere in the middle. They did what they were told. But, given such a good reason, they would commit their entire lives to the Commission. Jesus knew, though, they would also need specific instructions to follow. And so, after Jesus gives his followers the command to go and tell others about him, he gives

them some detail on where: Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the Ends of the Earth. Why did Jesus do this? Was he just being poetic? Did he think “everywhere” wasn’t descriptive enough? Did he think his disciples were so dense they needed an explanation? Well, that last one might have more merit than it seems. These 4 places would have had great significance to these folks.

See, without going too deeply into the geography of first-century Israel, this list of places Jesus gives in our Great Commission form concentric circles starting in Jerusalem and moving outward.

The innermost circle of influence is Jerusalem, your closest relationships.

But then Jesus moves out a

step, to Judea. Judea was the region Jerusalem was in. So this was an area that was outside their home base, but still an area they were very familiar with. So when Jesus says this to the disciples, he’s saying, “You’ll be my witnesses first in your home, but then also in the regions where you have connections, where you know people and the towns you’ve been to, where people operate like you do.” We first witness in our homes, but we then extend that to our Judeas, our inner circles.

Jesus gives us the same *where*. Our Judea is the places we are comfortable... our communities, our clubs and organizations, our



circles of friends and acquaintances, the places we work and play. If Jerusalem is our home sphere, Judea is our inner circles.

Question 2: Take a moment to identify your Judea. What are your “inner circles”? Your friend groups? Clubs? Colleagues? Organizations? Share with the group.

Here’s the thing about this sphere of influence... Judea might be both the most powerful *and* most intimidating space where you are called to tell others about Jesus. This might be the region where you can have the most influence and impact, and yet, is also the one with the most risk and difficulty involved. It’s a paradox. In your Jerusalem, (your immediate relationships of family, partner, kids, and/or self,) you can have spiritual conversations and they’re stuck with you. They have to accept your weirdness. And if you skip to circles farther outside Judea, you’re with people you don’t know. So, if you come across weird, who cares? You’ll probably never see them again. But with Judea, (your friends, coworkers, fellow club members,) you have relationships with these people and have to see them again. The stakes are higher. And so, we have this paradox. We know these people, so we don’t want to be labeled the weirdo, Jesus freak, but this is also the sphere where we’ve built the depth of relationship to be able to have those conversations in the first place. You know these people. You know their stories. You know their lives. And you might just open a door for them to a relationship with Christ through which their life could be forever changed.

Question 3: Identify a relationship or two in your Judea where God might be asking you to share your faith with that person. Who in this sphere might need a specific message of hope?

Closing...

It takes boldness to make that step. But when someone in our Judea comes to us and pours their heart out to us, when they admit they're struggling with something in life, we can say, "you know, I don't know if it will help or not, but why don't you come to worship with me this Sunday?" Or, "I've got this great group of folks I talk to all the time. Why don't you join me Wednesday evening at our Connect Group?" Or even, "hey, here's a link to a message our pastor gave last week about that very thing... his jokes are awful, but he had a good point... just one, somewhere in there. Give it a look, then we can talk about it." And so, when it comes to living out this Commission, Judea might be the most difficult but also the most powerful circle. Ask and answer that question... how are you being a witness for Christ in your Judea, your *inner circles*? And then, this week, pray for someone in your Judea. Pray for God to put a name on your heart of someone in that inner circle, and God will open your eyes to a person who needs to hear they are loved. Remember, YOU are sent.

Take some time to share prayer requests or celebrations.

Close in prayer.