

YOU WILL BE MY WITNESSES*

Ever since Adam's error, God has employed witnesses to testify about who He is, what He has done, and what He will do in times to come. Adam and Eve, eyewitnesses to Eden, testified about God, being in relationship with Him, and about the promise of a Son who would crush the head of the serpent. (See Genesis 2–3.) Enoch walked with God, prophesied, and his supernatural life was, in itself, a testimony. (See Genesis 5:21-23.) Noah was a preacher of righteousness who built an ark because he believed what God told him about the judgment that was to come on the world in his day. (See Genesis 6:9-22; 2 Peter 2:5.) Later, when it seemed that all hope was lost and no one in the world worshipped or acknowledged God, God called upon Abraham to live a life of faith as a witness of the one true God. (See Genesis 12:1-4) Later, when God led the nation of Israel out of slavery, the miracles, signs, and wonders done in Egypt and the parted waters of the Red Sea testified to all the surrounding nations that the most powerful God of all creation was with His chosen people. (See Exodus 15:14-16, 18:1; Joshua 2:10.) The Laws of God were given to Israel to govern them so that they would be a living testimony as witnesses with first-hand experience of the Most High God's holiness, justice, and power. (See Exodus 19:4-6; Deuteronomy 4:5-6, 33-35; Isaiah 43:10, 12, 44:8.) Jesus came to testify of God's Kingdom, God's righteous day of judgment to come, and the opportunity to receive mercy by grace through faith in Him. After the resurrection, Jesus commissioned His disciples as His witnesses to all the nations of the earth.

*Luke 24:46-48: He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. **You are witnesses of these things.**"*

*Matthew 28:18-20: Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. **Therefore go and make disciples of all nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and **teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you**. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

*Acts 1:8: But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; **and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.**"*

The same command remains for us today. Each one of us has been commissioned by Jesus to declare the good news of Jesus Christ so that everyone can hear and believe. (See Romans 10:8-17.) We have a responsibility to deliver God's message and, significantly, Jesus will not return until we have accomplished our task as His witnesses to the whole world.

*Matthew 24:14: 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**.*

MY WITNESSES

In a legal sense, a witness is "one who affirms what they have seen, heard, or experienced." In a court of Law, a witness testifies for or against someone or something based on what they know about that person or situation. For example, Jesus left His home in heaven as God's witness in order to testify about what He had seen, heard, and experienced of the Kingdom of God. Now, He sends His disciples out as His witnesses to share with the world what we have seen, heard, and experienced of Jesus.

As we have discussed, this means that witnessing for Christ starts with being cut to the heart in our own lives. We cannot share with others what we do not know for ourselves. God hates hypocrisy and knows that it is easy to refute the testimony of a witness who lacks integrity. The way we live our lives shares a thousand testimonies even when we never speak a word, and even when we are not teaching, preaching, sharing our testimony, or deliberately making disciples.

Moreover, a transformed person simply can't help but tell everyone about Jesus! A true witness for Christ does not consider Jesus' commission to be a work assignment or intolerable burden of responsibility. When our lives have been changed by Jesus Christ, we are always prepared to share the story of how Jesus Christ has changed our lives by His salvation, no matter what happens to us! (See 1 Peter 3:15.)

This is what happened with the first followers of Jesus. Every single one of the first 120 believers in Jerusalem was someone whose life had been dramatically changed by Jesus Christ. This group contained ordinary fishermen who had walked with Jesus while He performed miracles, men and women whom Christ had healed from sickness and freed from demonic oppression, Jesus' mother Mary, who still remembered Jesus' divine conception by the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus' half-brothers who had not previously believed that Jesus was the Christ, and other disciples who had seen and heard the resurrected Jesus with their own eyes and ears. (See Acts 1:13-15, 2:1, 10:41; 1 Corinthians 15:3-7.) These believers could not return to life as usual after the resurrection of Christ. Their purpose in life was permanently altered as the great commission became their eternal assignment.

*Acts 4:19-20: But Peter and John replied, "Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! As for us, **we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.**"*

*Acts 5:30-32: **The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead--whom you killed by hanging him on a cross. God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins. We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.***

Throughout the Book of Acts and beyond, the word of God's redemption through Jesus Christ spread throughout the world. God added masses of people to His Kingdom through their faith in His Son.

*Acts 2:41, 47b: Those who accepted his message were baptized, and **about three thousand were added to their number that day.** ... And **the Lord added to their number daily** those who were being saved.*

*Acts 4:4: But **many who heard the message believed;** so the **number of men who believed grew to about five thousand.***

*Acts 6:7: **So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly,** and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.*

*Act 11:21: The Lord's hand was with them, and **a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.***

*Acts 12:24: But the **word of God continued to spread and flourish.***

*Acts 19:20: In this way **the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.***

This said, not everyone will receive the Gospel message. When Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God, He often finished His teaching by saying, "if anyone has ears to hear, let them hear!" He knew that not everyone who has natural ears has the ability to hear what the Spirit of the Lord is saying.

Moreover, when Jesus sent His disciples to testify about Him, He prepared them for those who would reject the message of the Kingdom of God by telling them to "shake the dust off of their feet." This is a sign of judgment and cannot be taken lightly as we remember that the foremost objective of witnessing is to wash people's feet from the dust and wickedness of this world, not to shake dust back at them. (See John 13:1-20.) Christ's disciples were Jewish and knew that when a Jew left a Gentile town or city, they would

literally shake the dust off their feet to symbolically demonstrate their holiness and separation from the error of the Gentile's worldly ways. Because of this, they understood that when someone rejected the good news of the Kingdom, they shook the dust off of their feet to visibly express the rejecter's error.

*Matthew 10:14-15: **If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, leave that home or town and shake the dust off your feet. Truly I tell you, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town.** (Also Mark 6:10-11; Luke 9:5.)*

Even if people do not listen to us, it is still our responsibility to, "GO." We must share the love of God through Jesus Christ with all people everywhere. As an example of this duty, in the Old Testament, God called upon the prophet Ezekiel to declare to an exiled people a message of hope through repentance from sin. Ezekiel was accountable to God for sharing the message but not for how people responded to it. If Ezekiel shared the message and the people did not repent of their sin, then their sin was on their own head because they had been given the opportunity to believe and chose not to. However, if Ezekiel did not share the message with the people, then God held their sin against Ezekiel. (See Ezekiel 33:1-9.)

As disciples of Christ, we have a responsibility for proclaiming the Gospel to all nations. We are not responsible for how people respond to the message. It is God who grants repentance to those whom He has chosen.

*Acts 11:18: When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, "So then, **even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life.**"*

*Acts 13:48: When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and **all who were appointed for eternal life believed.** (See also 2Timothy 2:19.)*

*2Timothy 2:25: Opponents must be gently instructed, **in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth.***

The Apostle Paul alluded to the connection between Ezekiel's accountability to God the obligation of witnessing for Christ when he declared himself to be innocent of everyone's guilt because he had faithfully preached the whole counsel of God to them. (See Acts 20:26-27.)

MAKE DISCIPLES

Along these lines, it is important to recognize that the commission of Jesus is not, "Go and make people say a prayer to receive eternal salvation," but, "Go and make disciples by teaching them everything I have taught you." God is not after converts, prayers, and professions of faith without circumcised hearts. God is looking for transformed lives of people who will repent of their own ways in order to reveal His nature and power to the lost and dying world. The Apostle Paul referred to this as drawing people into the obedience of faith. (See Romans 1:5, 16:26.)

In fact, the word Jesus used for *make disciples* means, "to follow the precepts, to enlist as a scholar, to teach or instruct." As such, making disciples is helping people apply God's **you first** policy in their own lives by aligning their lives with the teachings and commands of Jesus. This said, the way that each disciple of Christ makes other disciples of Jesus will vary based on how God has designed and called us. Throughout the Book of Acts and beyond, the Holy Spirit revealed Christ's chosen apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers. (See Acts 1:2, 5:29, 11:27, 13:1, 15:32, 20:28, 21:8, 10.)

*Ephesians 4:7, 11-13: But to **each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. ... So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.***

Even today, every believer is a gift from Christ to the rest of the Body which corresponds to these types of ministries. Each ministry reflects a different aspect of Christ's mission but has the same purpose – to make disciples by drawing others to spiritual maturity and unity with one another. God desires for us to be a

living, breathing, walking, talking demonstration of His grace through Jesus Christ. Simply put, the aim of the Christian life is *Christlikeness*, both individually and corporately as a witness for Christ to all creation.

Ephesians 3:10-11: His [God's] intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

BY TEACHING, PREACHING, TESTIFYING

Throughout the Book of Acts, believers everywhere testified about the resurrection of Jesus. Their focal point was not on the cross of Christ or His suffering but on His resurrection to eternal life. The resurrection confirms God's choice and acceptance of Jesus' offering of atonement for the sins of the world. Amen!

*Acts 4:2, 33a: They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, **proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead**.... With great power the apostles **continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.***

Also Acts 2:24,32, 3:15, 4:10, 5:30, 10:40, 13:30, 17:31, 23:6.

The Gospel message was shared in various ways depending on who was speaking and who was listening. Primarily, this was done through teaching, preaching, and testifying. Simply put, teaching is instruction from the Scriptures in the knowledge of God through Jesus Christ; preaching is sharing the good news of Christ's salvation; and testifying is sharing a personal story or experience of the transformative power of God through Jesus. Jewish people who knew the Scriptures typically wanted evidence from the Word of God to prove that Jesus is the Messiah and some kind of supernatural confirming sign from God to prove it. Gentiles were most often looking for wisdom or higher understanding so that they could live a better life. (See 1 Corinthians 1:22.) The message of the gospel was tailored to the audience so that the hearers could believe and be saved but without compromising God's message or intent.

*1 Corinthians 9:19-22: Though I am free and belong to no one, **I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible.** To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. **I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.***

An example of Paul's **teaching**, was in Pisidian Antioch. In the Jewish synagogue after the customary Scripture reading, Paul stood up and taught from the Scriptures that Jesus is the promised Messiah of Israel. Paul addressed his fellow Israelites as children of Abraham and God's special people by birth. (See Genesis 12-25.) From the Scriptures, He refreshed their memory about the events from the time of their exodus from Egyptian slavery to the time when God promised David that the Messiah of Israel would come from his descendants and would rule on God's throne for all eternity with an everlasting dynasty. (See 2 Samuel 7.) Then, Paul pointed to John the Baptist as Jesus' forerunner (in the spirit of Elijah), who announced the coming of the King and the Kingdom of God and how in fulfillment of all the prophecies, the religious leaders crucified Him. (See Isaiah 40:3; 53.) But God, by His power, had raised Jesus from the dead giving irrefutable proof that Jesus is the Messiah of Israel and the King above all kings who reigns forever. This is good news! The Messiah that all Israel had been waiting for had come and, through faith in Him they could have a right relationship with God, something that they had never been able to attain through obedience to the Law. Other examples of this kind of teaching of the Gospel include the speeches of Peter and Stephen, Philip's teaching to an Ethiopian eunuch, and Apollos refuting opponents with the Scriptures. (See Acts 2, 3, 7, 8:26-40, 13:16-41, 18:27-28.)

As an example of Paul's **preaching**, in both Lystra and Athens, Paul spoke to Gentiles who did not have any Scriptural knowledge of the one true God but needed to hear the Gospel to be saved. The people of Lystra worshipped many idols and believed in the power of the gods. The people in Athens also had

idols but emphasized epicurean or stoic philosophy. Epicureans were materialists who believed that the world was ruled by chance and, accordingly, their approach to life was, *eat, drink, and be merry*. Stoics believed that the world was ruled by fate which was out of their control and, therefore, their aim was to live with minimal emotion and in alignment with the laws of nature while their mindset was, "what will be will be." Paul tailored his message in these places to refute their existing beliefs and tell them about Jesus.

*Acts 14:15b-17: **We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things [idols] to the living God, who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them. In the past, he let all nations go their own way. Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy.***"

*Acts 17:23, 30-31: For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship--and **this is what I am going to proclaim to you.** ... In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but **now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.***

In both instances, Paul highlighted God's role as Creator of the Universe. Paul highlighted God's loving provision of rain, crops, sustenance, and life as the obvious sign of God's existence and of His goodness towards all that He created. (See also Romans 1:19-20; Matthew 5:43-48.) Paul informed them of how every person in every nation on earth is descended from Adam, whom God had created, and how God loves all people in spite of the fact that they do not know Him or worship Him. Paul stressed God's authority and control over all the nations of the earth throughout the entire course of history, indicating that God is the true eternal Judge of all. Paul preached the resurrection as proof that God has appointed Jesus Christ as the eternal Judge, and that He will return to administer justice, including everlasting life to those who have believed and everlasting wrath to those who have not believed. Notably, Paul did not bash people or their beliefs. He used what they believed to be true as a segue into revealing the superiority of Jesus Christ as the one true God's Chosen One and only Son.

Examples of Paul's testifying can also be found in the Book of Acts. (See Acts 22:3-21, 26:1-23.) Paul did not shrink back from sharing the full story of how off course he had been before he believed Jesus and how God, in His great mercy, had intervened in his life. Additionally, there are countless other examples in the Scriptures including all the stories that are not told of how Jesus changed people's lives.

*John 9:25: He replied, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. **One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!**"*

*John 4:28-29, 39: Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, "**Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did.** Could this be the Messiah?" ... Many of the Samaritans from that town **believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did."***

*John 21:25: **Jesus did many other things as well.** If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.*

TO THE END OF THE AGE

Until Jesus returns, our commission from Him is to make disciples for His Kingdom out of every nation, tribe, and tongue. People everywhere need to hear the word of what Jesus has done for us to spare us from the wrath of God and the day of judgment that is yet to come. People everywhere need to repent from their sins and turn to Jesus for their salvation. There is no other way to be saved. (See Acts 4:12.)

*Acts 26:16-18: Now get up and stand on your feet. **I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness** of what you have seen and will see of me... **I am sending***

you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.

Act 2:38-40: Peter replied, "**Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off--for all whom the Lord our God will call.**" With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "**Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.**"

No matter what happens to us or what opposition we face, our assignment from the Lord remains until everyone whom God has chosen for eternal life has heard and put their trust in Jesus.

Acts 5:20: "**Go, stand in the temple courts,**" he said, "**and tell the people all about this new life.**"

Acts 18:9-10: One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: "**Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.**"

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