

# Witnesses for Christ

Acts 1:8-11

May 14, 2017

Last week pastor Jeff spoke about a life of worship. And he made a shocking and yet valid claim that everyone on earth lives a life of worship. We are wired for that. However, we either worship the true and living God – or we worship idols. There are no other categories to worship.

And this morning I can say with biblical certainty, all Christians are called to be witnesses for Christ. And so here is my shocking claim – all professing Christians are witnesses to the world that we have embraced Christ as Lord – or we are witnesses to the world that we have allowed idols to capture our affections. If we are in the second category, it doesn't have to stay that way. Living Hope Church wants to help each and every one of us to live lives that testify – Christ is Lord. That should be the goal of every Christian and every Church.

The text that launches this message is Acts 1:8-11. These are some of the last words the resurrected Lord Jesus spoke to His disciples before He ascended into heaven. And Christ did not mince His words about what He wants His followers to do, and how we are to accomplish His mission for our lives,

*“But you [Christ’s disciples] will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you [if we do not welcome the Holy Spirit to be in charge of our lives, then we will not have the power necessary to live lives which testify that Christ is Lord. And so by the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus says]; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. 9 After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. 10 They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white [angels] stood beside them. 11 ‘Men of Galilee,’ they said, ‘why do you stand here looking into the sky? [that is not your job description] This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.’”*

What the angels were saying to the disciples is – until Christ does bodily return – get back to work. The job of Christ's witnesses is to continue and finish the work that Christ started. Luke, who is the writer of the book of Acts, implies this same truth in Acts 1:1-2,

*“In my former book [the Gospel of Luke] . . . I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach 2 until the day he was taken up to heaven after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.”*

The Gospel of Luke is all about the life and ministry of Jesus while He was here on earth – and it ends with Christ's ascension into heaven. The book of Acts is all about what Jesus continues to do here on earth – by working through His Church, His appointed witnesses. And the only way we can be effective witnesses for Christ is by the power of the Holy Spirit. Did you notice in verse 2, that even after His resurrection, Christ spoke to His disciples through the guidance of the Holy Spirit? If we are to be like Jesus, we must also learn to speak through the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Please don't tell me that the Holy Spirit is in charge of your life if you never open the Bible. And some of you are struggling to read the Bible because you don't understand it. This is why we are suppose to meet with other Christians, so we can help each other understand and obey God's Word by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Before I go any further, let me give a basic definition of what it means to be a witness. Very simply, a witness is someone who testifies to what he has seen or heard. We don't have to go

very far in the book of Acts to discover that one of the most important events the Apostles witnessed was Christ's resurrection. It is the emphasis of Apostolic preaching. In Peter's first sermon he says, "*God has raised this Jesus to life, and we [the disciples] are all witnesses of the fact.*"

Why was being an eye witness of Christ's resurrection so important? Because if Christ did not rise from the dead, then He was not the Son of God and none of the claims He made about Himself were true. To put it bluntly, if Christ did not rise from the dead, there would be no Christian faith. We know this because the lives of the disciples were shattered when Christ died. If Christ had not risen, they had no good news to share.

We should all be aware that no one can explain the lives of the Apostles apart from the fact that they were eye witnesses of Christ's resurrection. How certain were they of it? They were all willing to die for that fact. Were any of us eye witnesses of Christ's resurrection? No, but I am 100% sure that Christ rose from the dead because the good news of the gospel has been going out to all the world for 2,000 years, and that simply would not have happened if Christ had not risen.

I am going to shift gears with this next question. When the Apostles stated that they were eye-witness of Christ's resurrection, was that good news for everyone? No. Listen to Peter's words spoken to a Jewish crowd at Jerusalem in Acts 3:13-15. Peter made these statements just a few months after Christ's death and resurrection,

*"The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. 14 You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. 15 You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this."*

The crowd Peter was speaking to had every reason to be scared spitless if Peter was telling the truth about Christ's resurrection. I say that because of what we read in Matthew 26:59, concerning events which took place during the night before Christ was crucified, "*The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence [false witnesses] against Jesus so that they could put him to death.*"

The Ninth Commandment, which has a courtroom setting, states, "*You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.*" But what are the Biblical consequences if we do? We are told in Deuteronomy 19:18, "*. . . if the witness proves to be a liar, giving false testimony against his brother, then do to him as he intended to do to his brother.*"

The penalty Christ received because of those who falsely testified against Him – was death. Therefore what penalty should Christ's false witnesses receive? The death penalty. But it did not have to be that way if they had listened to the further witness of Peter recorded in Acts 3:17-19,

*"Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. 18 But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer. 19 Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord" [Christ's crucifixion was the worst crime in the history of mankind. But it was not beyond God's grace. That is why we sing about Amazing Grace].*

There is an important line of reasoning I need to follow: According to Romans 1, everyone knows there is a God. Many people stuff that knowledge deep down inside – but the heavens and the earth shout that there is a Creator-God. (2) All unbelievers know by means of a God-

given conscience that things are not right between them and God. People know these basic truths without anyone of us being witnesses for Christ. What people cannot know, apart from the witness of Christians, is that God has provided a solution to our sin problem and our lost condition. Christians have a vital role to play. And we must not think that sharing the good news of the gospel is the job of pastors, missionaries and evangelists. Living and sharing the gospel is the job of all Christians. Acts 11:19- 21, speaks of this truth very clearly,

*“Now those who had been scattered by the persecution [carried out by Jews against Christians living in Jerusalem] . . . traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews [the Church was initially all Jewish]. 20 Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch [in Syria] and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. 21 The Lord’s hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.”*

The goal of Living Hope Church is to help each other become the best witnesses for Christ that we can be. And there are numerous ways to go about this. For example, in Acts 9:36 we read, *“In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha . . . who was always doing good and helping the poor.”* I believe those acts of kindness also gave Tabitha opportunities to speak to others about Christ – which is the highest good we can do for our fellow man because it can change a person’s eternal destiny.

Tabitha was not a professional missionary or evangelist. But she was a very effective witness for Christ. I am pretty sure some of you may be thinking that you cannot be an effective witness for Christ because your particular abilities and station in life doesn’t afford you many opportunities to influence others. That is false. The Apostle Paul addresses this issue in Colossians 3:22-23,

*“Slaves [that is a pretty stifling station in life], obey your earthly masters in everything [unless they tell you to do what God forbids]; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. 23 Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men.”*

Verse 23 provides a key way for all Christian to grow in our ability to be a good witness for Christ. We can paraphrase this verse by saying, “Live your life before the audience of One – and that One is God.” Someone has said, “To supremely desire God’s will, is to be in God’s will.” Being a slave could not stop a person from supremely desiring God’s will and thereby being a good witness for Christ. What will ruin our witness for Christ is when we remain self-centered and chase after idols. Paul sternly warns about this in I Corinthians 6:1-7,

*“If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly [a secular court] for judgment instead of before the saints [this is one of the reasons churches have elders]? 2 Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? . . . 5 I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? 6 But instead, one brother goes to law against another – and this in front of unbelievers! 7 The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already.”*

My final point for the morning is this: Everyone who is a genuine follower of Christ has a personal testimony. We are all witnesses of what Christ has done for us. When I was eight years old my ten year old brother had a friend whose church was conducting a vacation Bible School and he invited us to come. I had just finished 9 grueling months of 3rd grade and the last thing I wanted to do was go to more school. But my brother told my mother about it and my mother said I was going. My deep sorrow was softened a bit when I discovered there were cookies, punch and crafts at Vacation Bible School. But on Friday of that week, I was glad to get out of there. There was a lot of talk about God and that made me nervous. My older brother however, was not in a rush to go home. He excitedly told me that we could speak with the pastor and he

would tell us how to be saved. There were others who could have told us, but that is what pastors are paid to do. One of the last things in the world I wanted to do was to speak to that pastor. But being older and stronger than me, my brother dragged me with him into the pastor's office. The pastor sat us down and told us in no uncertain terms that we were sinners and on our way to hell [which confirmed why I did not want to talk to him]. The pastor then told us that Jesus is God's Son and that He made a way on the cross for sinful people to be forgiven and put into a right relationship with God. He then asked if we wanted to pray and put our trust in Christ? All my emotions were screaming out that trusting in Jesus would ruin my life. But a still small voice told me it was the right thing to do. And by God's grace I listened to the still small voice.

At eight years old, I hadn't robbed and plundered my community, but I had already seared my conscience about lying. For example, when I was about 5 years old I was fascinated to watch my dad shave. He told me very clearly not to play with his razor blades because they were sharp and could cut me. Weeks later I had to see for myself if that was true – and it was. When my dad saw my bloody fingers, he asked what happened? I told him that I had crawled under the house and a snake bit me. That lie just rolled off my tongue so easily. My dad tried not to laugh but failed and decided that my cut fingers were punishment enough. But I decided that lying could be very useful.

And so I was an eight year old, self-centered liar when I met Christ. The two things I noticed most after I had trusted in Christ was an awareness of God's presence and a conviction about sin I did not have before. When I went to tell my first lie, the Holy Spirit indicated that was wrong. When I think about what my life would be like if I had not been told about Christ, my guts knot up inside of me. What a dark place I would be in today if not for Christ. And friends, when we are good witnesses for Christ, He uses us to help others escape from Satan's domain of darkness and come into Christ's kingdom of light. Eternal destinies are changed by the gospel. Let's pray.