

BEING A WITNESS FOR CHRIST

Paul Linnell – Evening, 13th June 2021

(Sermon Summary)

Reading: Acts 1:8; Acts 10:34-48.

Questions about identity are a big issue today. Questions such as ‘Who am I?’ are questions that people are often asking themselves. But we are more and more detached from reality in the answers that people are giving, such as on the matter of whether we are male or female. As Christians we are able to say that we are born again of the Spirit. We are a privileged people who have a devotion to God.

God, in fact, gives us an identity. He gives us names and roles such as sheep, sons, stewards, disciples, and soldiers. These terms tell us more about our relationship to God than they tell us about ourselves as such. They tell us about who we belong to. By belonging to Him, it means that we are witnesses to Him and of Him. We therefore have to ask ourselves, as witnesses of Him, how we should live to honour Him. That is the challenge Philippians 3:16 is putting before us.

The word, witness, is actually the Greek word *martus*, meaning a witness. It is a person who has seen something with their own eyes, like an observer or spectator. It has a legal context in that we report truthfully what we have seen.

The Scriptures are themselves a witness or testimony. The Old Testament is a testimony (witness) as the Lord states in John 5:39. In Acts 10:43 Peter tells the people that the prophets witness to the Lord Jesus. John the Baptist is a prophetic witness to the Lord (John 1:29). That same sense of testimony and witness of the Scriptures is there in the New Testament as well (1 John 4:14). Our Lord Himself speaks of the witness of Scripture to Himself, for example, in Luke 24:44.

In John’s writings there is a great emphasis on the subject of testimony (witness) in, for example, John 20:31. The power of that witness comes out in the passage in Acts 10:34-48. The mention of witness is there in v39, v41, v42, and v43. So the word of God is God’s witness to Himself and especially to His work of salvation (Revelation 19:20).

So we go on to look at how to be a witness to Christ today.

1. A Christian is a witness to Christ.

Acts 1:8 tells us that we are witnesses to Christ. We can see that the geography of it takes us to the ends of the earth. Hebrews 2:3-4 reminds us that the time of the actual witnesses is past and that it is for those who follow to take up the role. The actual eyewitnesses have finished their work and now pass it on to non-eye witnesses. Indeed, those witnesses, who have not actually seen themselves, are declared to be blessed (John 20:29). So we now carry on, person-to-person, the work of witnessing to the saving truth.

In a way, it is like how a seed propagates itself. There are three parts to it. It has, firstly, its DNA. This is the information that will enable the seed to reproduce itself. Secondly, it has something like an engine that enables it to do the work. Thirdly, it has energy to empower the process. So the gospel has truth, like the DNA, us, as the engine, and the power given to us to pass the truth on to others. We believe the truth about the Lord Jesus Christ and point people to Him. But beyond that, we are able to say that we know Him personally. We wonder that the Lord puts such vast treasure in such weak vessels like us but this is so that the Lord alone has the glory (1 Corinthians 1:29).

2. How to be a witness worthy of Christ.

But we feel that we are bad and hopeless witnesses, and often feel like giving up. This is Satan's work to try to discourage us. It can be very difficult to witness to our family or to our work colleagues. They are always watching us and are looking for the opportunity to be able to call us hypocrites.

John 3:30 is helpful here. Imagine a courtroom and a high-profile trial. There are two witnesses appearing before the court. One is an ordinary person, like you or me. The other is a celebrity. Whose testimony is more likely to be believed? In the world it would be the celebrity. The Lord does not work like this. He uses people who are not full of themselves. There needs to be less of self, and more of Christ.

How do we get to the place where we decrease and the Lord increases? Scripture is a witness to the Lord and so we need to be reading it, praying it and applying it. We need to be asking ourselves as we read it, 'Where is He in all this? Where am I in the Scriptures?' The Bible's witness to God in His word then helps us in our witness to the world. As we then live as soldiers and servants, we are fulfilling His calling to us to be His witnesses.

Just as Hebrews 11 is a list of witnesses, so we continue in that way. We are part of all this as we live on to prove His strength and the genuineness of our faith. He is worthy of our discipleship even to the point of death and the loss of our own lives for Him. A convert from Hinduism was recently dragged from his home by a mob but he told them,

before he was beaten to death, 'I will never turn back.' For the believer, the resurrection is the proof that we have a living hope.

So we are to live up to what we are. May the Lord help us to obey what we read in Acts 1:8.