Can I Get a Witness?

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Date: 28 April 2024

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[0:00] Welcome here for this Sunday, April 28th, 2024. My name is Kent Dixon. It is my joy to be the pastor here. So I have a few questions for you this morning.

I haven't done any audience participation in quite a while, so today is the day. Now, a show of hands. Now, please keep your hand up once you have raised it, and I promise all the blood won't drain out of your hand.
This won't take long. So, remember, keep your hand up if you raise it for any of this. Has anyone been involved in a vehicle collision? And you hear me say vehicle collision because I used to work for AMA, and there's no such thing as an accident.
No such thing. Okay. Has anyone been present during the birth of a baby? Now, that's in any capacity. Keep your hands up if you had it up before. In any capacity.
See, in any capacity, whether an active participant or you observed the result, has anyone either personally participated in or attended a wedding?
[1:03] Hands raised. Keep your hands up. Okay. Has anyone been called to jury duty or actually appeared in court? God bless you. Okay.

Now, have a quick look around. Lots of hands, right? All right. One hundred. Oh, Olga, come on. There must be one. Okay. We're going to count Olga's hand as being up.
So, lots of hands up, right? So, put them down. I know Michelle can put up four hands for some of those questions. So, these are all forms of or examples of being a witness to something.
Now, that word is most often used as a noun. A person who gives evidence of something. Someone who has been present at an event or who can, we hear this terminology often, bear witness to the fact that it has actually happened.
So, this morning, we're continuing in our sermon series, Acts to All the World. And through this series, as you know, we're exploring the New Testament book of Acts. Last week, we considered the Father's promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit.
[2:13] And we tracked it through the Old and then the New Testaments. So, we recognize the power and work of the Holy Spirit in restoring and convicting and encouraging followers of Jesus.

That power is available to anyone who believes in Him and seeks to follow Jesus' example and teaching. But, what happens next?
Well, we learned our lives should bear good fruit, right? We talked about that. As an example of God's power, not only at work within us, but also available to other people.
Our sermon this morning is titled, Can I Get a Witness? So, that may make you chuckle and it may make you think lots of different things. But we're going to be focusing on Acts 1, verse 8, where Jesus says to the apostles, 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.
So, as we've just heard, before He ascended to heaven, Jesus gave His apostles both a promise of the Holy Spirit and a charge to be witnesses.
[3:31] He promised they would receive power through the Holy Spirit, but He also gave them an important task that we can hear in 1, verse 8, to be His witnesses.

And we began this morning, just a moment ago, by considering that basic idea of what it means to witness something, such as an event. But it's important for us to clarify as well how Jesus charged to the apostles, that's who He was speaking to, His original twelve inner circle, who are also disciples, by the way, we'll get into that at some point, to be His witnesses, and how that has changed in our understanding of it over time.
And that's what we're going to look at a bit this morning. So, another show of hands, you're getting all the audience participation you can handle. Who has heard the term witness or witnessing used

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as a verb, an action that we need to take?
Oh, some hands shot right up. Thank you. Have you come to understand those words as simply meaning, at least in some way, sharing the gospel with the lost?
Is that how you would understand the idea of being a witness or witnessing for Jesus Christ? Some nods. So, in that way, we can recognize how this idea has actually become synonymous with evangelism.
[4:55] We can recognize that. That sharing our faith with people who don't know Jesus, with the ultimate goal of them, I'm using all the terminology, right? Them accepting Jesus as their personal Savior.

We use it, we hear it all the time. So, does that sound familiar? I'm thinking with this demographic, it absolutely should sound very familiar. And so, that seems to have been the focus of Christianity, certainly in the 60s and 70s.
Witnessing to as many people as possible, and at times using tracts. And again, this demographic, I say tracts and you know exactly what I mean.
Little cartoon evangelism tool. My oldest brother is a big fan of them. But, illustrations used as an evangelism tool. So, now I have a question.
Is witnessing, and this one's rhetorical, so you don't have to raise your hand. Is witnessing, that term, an accurate term for our evangelistic efforts? Can we witness today in the same way as the apostles did in carrying out the charge that Jesus gave them?
[6:09] So, we're going to take a closer look at that this morning. So, what does witnessing for Christ, there's the terminology again, look like today?

Well, follow along with me. I think this will be familiar. So, I think it looks a bit like this. After telling someone else what it means to accept Jesus, Does that sound familiar?
It's this act of sharing someone's own personal experience of receiving Christ that is generally referred to as witnessing to someone else.
And the goal then is generally to convince someone else of the power of the gospel to transform someone's life. So, then once someone has accepted Jesus, Now, I use the quote, fingers not out of disrespect, because I respect all of this.
But, I'm showing you the terminology. Once someone has accepted Jesus, the next step is to usually encourage them to develop their own witness of how their life was changed that they can then share with others.
[7:28] Does that also sound familiar? This witness might describe what their circumstances were, what their attitudes or perspectives were like before they accepted Jesus.

And then the five W's, who, what, why, where, when, how, around their conversion. So, the changes that took place then after they accepted Jesus.
So, the before, the how, the after. And then, of course, we can also recognize that the more dramatic or significant the experience, the better.
So, I can tell you my conversion story, very uninspiring. Extremely uninspiring. My mother shared from Scripture what it meant.
She didn't tell me, this is how I accepted Jesus. This is what, you know, this was my miraculous lightning bolt experience. She just shared me, shared with me the truth out of Scripture.
[8:26] And I said, that's what I want. So, very boring, right? But we all know of conversion stories or stories of people accepting the Lord that were transformational, that were a day and night difference in their story, in their journey, in their experience.

So, does all of that sound familiar? That terminology, that model, all of those things sound familiar?
So, let's look at the New Testament.
So, the New Testament does talk about people being witnesses. And in our passage this morning from Acts 1, verse 8, Jesus clearly states, You will be my witnesses.
There's no ambiguity there. So, traditionally, our passage from this morning has been taken to mean that all Christians were to witness for Christ.
And that came to mean doing that in the way that we have considered this morning. But now, let's dig in. So, we're going to consider a few things.
[9:34] Were the witnesses referred to in our text this morning meant to be all Christians or just a select few? Now, don't panic. Don't panic.

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And what did Jesus mean by being his witnesses? What did he mean in that context? Did he mean he wanted them to just bear witness to their own conversion?
Or something more? Does the text from this morning imply that all Christians are to be witnesses in the same way? And if so, in what ways?
So, let's turn to the New Testament for context on this. So, first, who was intended to be witnesses for Christ? Whom were the witnesses of Christ intended to be?
Well, it's often important to zoom out. We can all recognize this from a very specific passage or verse to get further context or content that usually can't be seen up close.
[10:36] Right? So, let's pull back and hear the words of Acts 1 verses 1 to 11. And some of this is very familiar. You're probably thinking to yourself, good grief, Pastor Kent.

How long are we going to spend in Acts 1? Well, a long time. No. We're going to spend some time because if you look at Acts 1, it is densely packed with critical stuff.
So, as we continue in Acts, I will pull out more and there will be more perspective and time will pass a little more quickly. But for now, there's so much to unpack in Acts 1.
So, Acts 1 chapter 1 to 11. In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.
After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs, sound familiar, that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of 40 days and spoke about the kingdom of God.
[11:39] On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command, Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my father promised, which you have heard me speak about.

For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit. Then they gathered around him and asked him, Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?
He said to them, It is not for you to know the times or dates the father has set by his own authority. 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.
After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them.
Men of Galilee, they said, Why do you stand here looking into the sky? Angels have a good sense of humor, I think. 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.
[12:55] So the context for this passage, now that we've zoomed out a bit, the specific directive, you will be my witnesses, was meant for, hold on to your Bibles, the apostles.

Do you hear the pronouns in that passage? To whom? There's a directive there. Them. They. You. Jesus was speaking to a specific audience.
And then when the angels appeared to the group after Jesus' ascension, they addressed them as men of Galilee. There's very specific recognition there of who they are and where they're from.
So this would have identified the apostles specifically. This group of men were from Galilee. And now it's important to recognize that men of Galilee reference because Jesus had, as we know, many other followers who were from other regions outside of Galilee.
So to speak to them in that way was very specific. So to be the particular kind of witness Jesus meant here would have also involved the kind of requirements that are outlined in Acts 1, 21 to 22.
[14:10] So if you want to flip there, or you can listen. Therefore, it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus was living among us, beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us.

For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection. So the kind of witness Jesus was referring to would have been someone who was with the apostles, with that group, from the time of Jesus' baptism until his ascension.
So that would have been a very specific group. Not only in who they were, what their origins were, from what region they came, but also what they were to witness to, or witness about.
So, oh, I missed your Acts passage. There it is. Everybody see it? Everyone saw it? You were witnesses to the slide being up? That's the challenge with running your own slides and trying to use

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your brain at the same time.
So second, what was their witness for Christ? To what were they called by Jesus to witness? Well, Acts 2, verse 32. So these are not listed, but I'll give you the references before I say them.
[15:35] Acts 2, verse 32 says, God has raised this Jesus to life and we are all witnesses of it. Flip to Acts 3, verse 15.

Peter addresses a crowd there and says, you killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. You are witnesses of this.
Now flip to Acts 5, 30 to 32. It says, 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.
Now flip a little further. Acts 13, verses 30 to 31. It says, So there's a pretty consistent message there.
[16:55] The apostles were called to bear witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That was their primary focus. Flip to Acts, back a little bit.

Acts 10, verses 39 to 42. Acts 10, 39 to 42. We are witnesses of everything that he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem.
They killed him by hanging him on a cross, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen, by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.
He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. So the apostles not only bore witness to Jesus' resurrection, but to his life, to his ministry.
So overall, though, Jesus' resurrection from the dead was clearly a primary focus of the witness of the apostles. So we can see that. There is a consistent message that Luke gives over and over restating their prime directive, if you will, if you're a Star Trek fan.
[18:16] So the Greek word for witness is martus, where we get the English word louder, martyr. So that's the name given to someone who is ultimately killed for confessing Christ.

So that Greek word martus has come to mean not just someone who witnesses and shares an event, but to the extent to which they're willing to go.
Acts 22, verse 20. Again, not listed, but I'll give you the references. Acts 22, verse 20 says, And when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shared, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.
Now flip to the very end. Revelation 2, verse 13. Revelation 2, 13 says, I know where you live, where Satan has his throne.
Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, not even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city, where Satan lives.
[19:31] Revelation 17, 6. That also refers to the sacrifice of those who gave their lives as witnesses to Christ.

So the extent to which people are willing to witness is also significant. Living a faithful life, even when it ultimately results in death, is really a powerful witness in itself.
So the term witness is never used in the New Testament, hear me say this, to someone who simply tells others about Jesus.
Not to someone who shares the detail of their own personal conversion experience. It's not the way it's used in the New Testament. So is that something we should be concerned about?
I told you a little while, don't panic. Do the specifics of the witness really matter? Who it's given by? As long as Jesus is ultimately glorified and people turn to God, does it matter?
[20:35] Isn't it part of our own responsibility within the Great Commission to make disciples, to tell other people about Jesus so that they can also seek and follow him?

Here's your relief part. Yes, it's very important. Very, very important. But I believe it's also important for us to recognize and appreciate the distinctions between both the focus of the message and the witness and its purpose.
So we're going to consider this for a bit. The modern witness provides a testimony that is specific to a person's own conversion, as we've talked about.

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It's a personal and specific testimony that describes the changes in someone's life. And so we can also recognize at times that it's been considered that the more dramatic the story, the more impactful it might be.
At times, I think we can also recognize that can lead to exaggeration or potentially even fabrication. I caught a fish that was this big, right?
[21:49] So without question, that modern witness can be considered much more subjective, potentially. The witness of the apostles provides testimony concerning the resurrection of Jesus.

These are eyewitness accounts, as we considered already in this series, based on empirical evidence. Evidence that's been confirmed by potentially both the number of people who personally saw it happen and their credibility.
We talked about in previous sermons in this series, what reason would they have had to go to the extent that they did to even put their lives at risk if none of this were true?
Their lives, their teaching, their suffering, even their deaths, testified to Jesus Christ. So the witnesses of the apostles would have provided potentially much more objective evidence.
So what about the distinction between the purposes of the two? Well, the purpose of the modern witness would be to have someone place their faith in Jesus. And that would be largely based on the conversion experience of one person's life.
[23:08] Is that fair? So the modern witness may often rely on more emotional appeals. That's where it can have its strength, can be most anchored.

Whereas the purpose of the witness of the apostles would have been to have someone place their faith in Jesus based on historical facts. based on the historical fact that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead.
People saw it happen, people testified that it happened, and thereby declaring him to be the Son of God. So the witness of the apostles seeks to encourage faith based on historical and empirical evidence.
So what about the strength of the witnesses? I don't know if you've ever experienced this, but what if the person whose testimony we came to believe and rely upon later, human nature, disappoints us?
Somehow proves to be a flawed example. If you put all your chips in that basket, what happens to the faith that you've anchored in that?
[24:19] What if the conversion on which we have relied, the conversion of someone else, proves to be less than real or even temporary? Wouldn't that serve to shake the foundations of our own faith?

Relying on historical fact and empirical evidence, the testimony of the apostles' witnesses remains consistent and unchanged. That witness would only serve to be strengthened by the way they lived their lives, by their teaching, by their preaching, or even sacrificing their own lives, dying for what they believed in.
So a faith that is based on and grounded in the testimony of the apostles is potentially less fickle and less fragile. The modern idea of witness leaves people potentially open to disappointment.
Not to mention, the witness, sir, puts a lot of pressure on them. Do you feel pressure? Feeling like you need to share Jesus with everyone you meet.
Is that how God wired you? Do you feel uncomfortable in doing that? Do you feel guilty that you're not? The apostolic witness creates a foundation of life for a strong faith.
[25:39] Jesus acknowledged that people would come to believe in him. Here's the personal testimony part. Through the words of his apostles. So, it is the words and the testimony of the apostles shared through us that can be meaningful in changing someone's life.

In John 17, John 17, verses 20 and 21, Jesus prays to the Father and he says, My prayer is not for them, the apostles, alone.
I pray also for those who believe in me through their message that all of them may be one. Father, just as you are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us so that the world will believe that you have sent me.
Stemming from this, as we considered last week, Jesus equipped the apostles with both many convincing proofs, as we've looked at, of his resurrection, but also the power of the Holy Spirit in them.

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So, as impressive as modern day testimonies may sound, as critical as they are in bridging an informational transaction there, it's important to be aware of people who may be improperly motivated to enhance their story.
[27:07] For attention, for flash, for impact. The historical empirical evidence makes a powerful case for who Jesus was during his earthly ministry, but not only that, who he continues to be today as he reigns at the Father's side, from where he will return one day as he promised.

When our lives are transformed by Jesus Christ, we have good news that is too wonderful to keep to ourselves. In addition to reaching other people with the gospel, we're also sharing the amazing story of God's salvation in our lives.
So, as you can see, our story is important because it connects to the witness of the apostles. apostles. My friends, continue to share your personal story.
Continue to share your journey with Jesus and the many ways that he has blessed your life. But don't rely, don't feel pressured by that alone being your sole testimony of him.
The gospel of Jesus Christ is desperately needed in our world today. Faith in Jesus and a new identity as God's child is the answer to so many of the anxieties and struggles people are facing in our world.
[28:31] Ask God to give you opportunities to do that. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you the strength and courage to be able to step outside your comfort zone when the time comes.

And remember, it is not your role to bring people to the Father. Don't feel the burden of your own story somehow being good enough or impressive enough because it is not that alone that will change people's lives and draw them to Jesus.
It is your role, it is my role to live as an example of how Jesus Christ can change a person's life. To share how he has done that for us.
Let your light shine. Point people to the many convincing proofs that the Bible itself provides. My friends, be open to God using you to bring the truth of his Son to someone who crosses your path. The Holy Spirit will do the rest. Amen.

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