

What is Witnessing?

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Date: 13 November 2013

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[0 : 00] Let's turn back to Isaiah chapter 43, and tonight we're looking at verses 10 to 12 particularly. Isaiah 43 at verse 10, You are my witnesses, declares the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he.

Before me no God was formed, nor shall there be any after me. I am the Lord, and beside me there is no saviour. I declared and saved and proclaimed when there was no strange God among you, and you are my witnesses, declares the Lord, and I am God.

Our topic this evening is witness or witnessing. What are witnesses in the teaching of the Bible? What do we understand by this word that we often use and hear used?

To witness. What is it to witness? What kind of person is a witness? Why does the Bible speak about God's people being witnesses? What does that entail? Where is it actually, where does it originate from?

Where is the idea of witness rooted? Because as you go in to look at where the ideas actually come from, then you're able better to understand something of what's involved.

[1 : 20] So what are witnesses? And what do we mean when we say that we witness for Christ? Or that a witness for Christ is affected by one thing or the other?

Well, here's a passage really that helps us understand where the idea of witness and witnessing in the teaching of the Bible arises from. It's not something that began when Christ sent his disciples into the world to be his witnesses, though that of course is specified by him there.

The whole idea of witnessing is actually rooted back in the Old Testament and especially in Israel as a people. When you ask who are God's witnesses, it helps us, if we ask that question first, to get some idea of what is meant by witness and witnessing in the Bible.

And you notice the context here. Here's one of the very interesting and really very significant things when you try and explain or try and understand what witness means and what it means for us as Christians to be witness.

The context in which you find it here and generally in the Old Testament is in the context of idolatry. And in this context of idolatry, you actually have a scene set before us in these words that is really pretty much a courtroom scenario.

[2 : 45] You have God presiding in a courtroom scene, in a courtroom setting, and he's calling upon witnesses to promote the case for idolatry.

And then he's saying to Israel, but you are my witnesses that I am God, that there is no other God besides me. And in that context, it's important that we can translate that into our own context in living in the world as Christians today, because it's essentially the same thing.

God is really saying to us, as he was saying to Israel, here you are and you're surrounded by idolatry. You're surrounded by all kinds of alternatives to me.

It doesn't matter out there what alternatives you come across. Whether it's in the teaching of secularism, whether it's another religion, whatever it is, as an alternative to God, it's pressing in upon us as his people, and therefore he is, as he was to Israel saying, call witnesses from them, let them try and establish the truth that these are really gods, and that they really do help people ultimately.

And I will call you my witnesses to actually witness for me. So that's the context in which you find this set.

[4 : 14] The context of idolatry, which of course you've got here commonly and frequently in Isaiah. But you notice if you go back to verse 8, you can see that it really begins there at verse 8, this courtroom scene, and God is saying, bring out the people who are blind and yet have eyes, who are deaf and yet have ears.

All the nations gather together and the peoples assemble. Who among them can declare this and show us the former things? Let them bring their witnesses to prove them right and let them hear and say it is true.

In other words, your witness as a Christian, your witness as a believer, directly confronts the witness that the world is seeking to set up against what you believe and in favor of what they believe themselves.

It's in that clash of cultures and context that your witness is always, always set. Witness for God doesn't really mean anything unless you take into account that it's in that context of facing an alternative that's opposite to what you believe in and trust in and love.

That's why our witness is the kind of thing that it is. That it's a direct confrontation to the witness of the world. Now you notice what God is saying. He's challenging those who supported idolatry in Israel and he's challenging all the representatives around and the nations around to bring forth witnesses to prove that they are right.

[5 : 51] And you know, that's what we still are engaged in. So much of what opposes Christianity today, and indeed it's always been the case by and large, but so much of it is sure that they are right.

But if you really examine it, whether it's in the name of science or in the name of whatever secularist kind of philosophy it is, the fact of the matter is when you examine it, it doesn't really hold up.

Certainly not against the arguments of Scripture. And the problem for them is that they largely dismiss Scripture as irrelevant. But that is what God is saying to these people.

And that's what God is still saying through us to the world out there. Bring forth your witnesses. Prove categorically that my God does not exist, that my God is not a savior, that my God is unimportant, that my God is not what the Bible says.

Can they do it? Do they have a reasonable case? Well, what does God say? In verse 8 there, what you find sometimes in the Bible is a kind of sarcasm, almost a humorous sarcasm.

[7 : 09] And we heard something of that from Dr. Davis over the course of the conference and even on Sabbath evening. The Bible does have that sarcasm in it, that very obvious sarcasm that takes on the thinking of the world or the enemies of God in a sarcastic way that really challenges them.

It's similar to what you find. And it's the same, in fact, as to what you find on Mount Carmel. We'll mention that in a minute. The contest between the idolatry of Baal and Elijah as the representative of the one and only true God.

What is he saying about them? He's saying in verse 8, Bring forth the people who are blind and yet have eyes, who are deaf and yet have ears.

There is the critical flaw in the case by the witnesses for atheism, for the world.

They have eyes, but they don't see. They have ears, but they don't hear. And God has changed that for you. Because the eyes he's given you to see with, not just physically, but spiritually, you see things because he's given you faith and trust in himself.

[8 : 28] You see things that you cannot see with the eyes of the world until they're opened. And isn't that the amazing thing that this blind man that Jesus healed in the Gospel of John in chapter 9, who was so ridiculed by the ruling elite amongst the religious leaders of the time in the synagogue.

They threw him out and abused him and persecuted him. And yet, you know, he came up with this absolutely powerful question when he was questioned about this.

And they told him that it was this man, Jesus. And then, of course, the ridiculed Jesus. Didn't know where he was from. We don't know his background. And he says, that's an amazing thing.

He has opened my eyes and you religious leaders can't tell me where he's from. Who can open the eyes of the blind but as Nicodemus put it regarding Christ's miracles, no one can do these miracles that you are doing except God sent him.

And here were these religious people saying to this poor man who was being challenged and abused and ridiculed, tell us, explain this to us. And he said, well, I can't, all I can say is it was this man, Jesus.

[9 : 49] When they heard that, they ridiculed the idea as well. And that's why the response of that blind man is so incredibly relevant and packed with meaning.

Here were all these religious leaders. They had eyes but they couldn't see. They had ears but they couldn't hear. They had ability but they had no spiritual insight or intellect.

and that blind man ridiculed by them put it in a nutshell it's an amazing thing that you can't tell me who this is who opened my eyes.

You are my witnesses says the Lord. Well, he's challenging them to the witnesses for the for idolatry for these alternatives to bring forth their case.

And you know, that's what you and I must constantly do in regard to the challenges from the world to what we believe. Not just to what we believe in terms of our salvation in Christ but the standard of life that God requires of any people.

[10 : 58] The standards of righteousness the ethics that the Bible brings out that are set not just for Christians but for every human being because that's what we ought to be in relation to God in relation to his truth.

And we have to keep challenging the view of the world the view of secularism the view of atheism whatever it is that says that that teaching of the Bible is irrelevant it's outmoded it's all the rest of it and we have to keep saying now why don't you bring forth your witnesses and actually prove that the alternative is better.

Prove now says God that you are right. And we have to be ready to face that and to face that to give a version of why we believe that that's wrong and we're right.

Now he says you are my witnesses. Israel was unique then among the nations because out of all the nations of the world at that time God had chosen Israel God had set his love upon them God had redeemed them from the bondage of Egypt of Egypt and formed them into a people who traveled under his leadership through the wilderness God had made them into a people who conquered the land of Canaan who drove out to an extent at least the Canaanites he had chosen them he had set them free he had taught them he had led them and that's what made them his witnesses that he was God the challenge from all the other witnesses could not stand up to the fact that Israel if they were true to their calling were themselves a clear witness and testimony to the reality of God of course they failed in that they very often failed in that that's why God has challenged them through Isaiah and reminding them again that they are his witnesses who are

God's witnesses well they are his people they are those whom God has redeemed whom God has delivered from the bondage of sin whom God has taken from darkness to light whom God has led and is leading in the way through this world the people to whom God has given a conviction that this Bible is his word that he is the author of it that he is the one who has given it to his people in every age from our experience we derive witness in other words witness is not something that we actually produce though there are responsibilities for us to witness to God witnessing is not something that we produce it's something that begins from what God creates in us when he creates life when he creates us as his people that is exactly what he is saying in chapter 43 here isn't it but now thus says the Lord he who created you O Jacob he who formed you O Israel fear not for I have redeemed you

[14:11] I have called you by name you are mine these are the people of whom he is saying you are my witnesses how did he how did he come to be his witnesses how did he come to be by his people the very act of God's creating them as a people for himself is a creation of witness to himself we have to may have to actually come back and open this up more in a practical sense we are looking tonight at the background of it the script you are teaching from which it arises from where we get our idea the Bible's idea of witness but wherever God creates life in any human being you cannot think that that person is not a witness to God the witness to God the Bible speaks about is what his people are is part and partial of his redemptive work in them as he works in his people so he creates the witness that his people are in other words yes there is an activity on our part yes we have to work out our witness and carefully assess sometimes how we are going to meet certain challenges how we are going to present the truth of God all of these things yes there is all of that to it but actually when you come to the root of the matter witness is not something that we do but something that God makes us into he makes us into witnesses he makes us into a witness for himself as his people the same thing you find in Acts chapter 1 remember there that the apostles are told by Jesus or they're going over what Jesus actually said to the apostles before he himself left them physically

Acts 1 and verse 8 there where Luke is saying this is what God said the Lord said to them when they asked Lord will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel he said to them it is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth now that little group of disciples didn't actually themselves literally go to the ends of the earth but he's still saying about that group of disciples as they embody his church from then on to the end of the world when the Spirit comes upon you when my Spirit comes to you in power and resides in you you will go forth and you will be my witnesses

I'm creating you a people and as I'm creating you a people I'm creating you a witness for myself that's what Jesus is saying based on what was long ago written in the time of Isaiah these are God's witnesses that's why you are a witness and your witness is rooted in God's work of redemption that he's redeemed you and made you a people for himself and built into that is the whole thing to do with the witness so let's ask secondly what evidence do God's witnesses bring forth here's the courtroom scene go back to the scene there's there's the representatives on idolatry and of course as we know from Isaiah's presentation of this great subject they can't present a credible case God is virtually saying

I can't accept that case it just doesn't add up it's not credible I have to throw it out so then he says but you my people you are my witnesses so what kind of case do we present what is our witness about what does our witness actually project to the world or to those who are looking at our witness and listening to the case that our lives make for God remember this is not just what you're saying with your mouth this is not just dependent on your ability or mine to argue a case for Christianity many of us can't do that myself included very well there are people in the world and in secular positions who will tie us in knots perhaps if we're just confining it to the words that we speak and how we put them together and how convincing an argument we can put together verbally that isn't what God is really saying though of course that's part of our witness and the witness of the church a great part and

God equips people for that specifically for that it's a strong point but don't worry tonight if you're really able to say of yourself but have to confess about yourself I really couldn't possibly produce a credible account in my own words in my own way of putting things because I don't have that ability so therefore I'm hardly a witness for God no your witness for God is your life and how you live and what you are as much as if not more than what you say and the evidence that God's witnesses produce by their life particularly without leaving out their words or statements but by their life particularly there are two things that our witness brings forth clearly first of all that God exists you see as we meet here tonight as the lights are on as every atheist in the surrounding villages or wherever looks at the lights they cannot actually get out of their head the possibility that God exists because they're seeing you as people as worshippers of this God and they may try to convince themselves as Paul says in Romans that the truth is not really what you and I believe but what they believe they suppress the truth in unrighteousness but the very fact that people are suppressing the truth pressing down on the truth stamping down on the truth means they're aware of what the truth really says and how are they aware of it not because they read their Bible because they watch your life and because as they watch your life they're watching a witness to God the wonderful thing about all of these young people who are still in school and actually here tonight because they're worshipping God with us as older adults why is that a wonderful thing because in their own environment in school they are a witness that God exists there will be many people in their schools even as pupils in their schools even as very young children in schools who are taught at home and elsewhere that God does not exist but all you have to say is well to me he exists

[21 : 51] I know he exists because I love him and he loves me and he worships me and I worship him and he hears my prayers and he gives me peace in my heart you are my witnesses people can't get that out of their minds however hard they try be convinced about that don't think that you witness just as a worshipper of God even if you confine it to that and it's by no means confined to that don't think that that's insignificant in terms of witness for God's existence but you know it's not just the bare fact of his existence that we witness and give evidence to as witnesses because this passage is really telling us far more than that as his witnesses Israel testifies to the existence of God not only do they testify to his existence but being a people that he has created for himself testifies that he is a great God that he is a redeeming

God that he is a God of glory that he is a God of mighty power that he is a God against whom all the gods of the nations are impotent that's why he repeats here isn't it that I even I am God I am the Lord your holy one the creator of Israel your king when we witness for God and our witnesses for God when we live for God we all know that we don't live perfect lives we all have to confess that there are flaws in our lifestyles at times that people can see faults in us let's not be too uptight about that although we can't push it aside as something insignificant but as witnesses to God our very existence as a people of God is something that witnesses to the world of the kind of God who exists and that he is this God who is glorious and sovereign and almighty and it's shown again pretty much by what you do as much as what you say remember and even what we are 1st

Peter where Peter was saying thereabout and again he is using Old Testament language borrowed from the likes of Isaiah where he is saying now that you are the people of God what are you?

You are a peculiar people you are a holy nation you are a people formed by God why? so that you should show forth the attributes the praises the qualities of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light so the evidence you bring forth in the case for God in your life as you live it is that God exists and that he exists as a glorious God as a sovereign God as a great God but then you add to that you also present in your witness that the God who exists is a savior and really that's also one of the primary emphasis in this passage in Isaiah as elsewhere in Isaiah how do we in our witness project the fact that God is a savior well there are three things in that first of all he redeems us from sin that's what he's saying isn't it in this passage time after time

I who created you fear not for I have redeemed you I have given certain people for you in exchange for your life you are my witnesses that I am the savior and besides me there is no savior he's emphasizing this matter of being a saving God a savior God and one of the great things that Isaiah says is that in saving his people and making them thereby his witnesses he has given others we'll come back to that in a minute in terms of something else but for I am the Lord your God he says in verse three the Holy One of us your savior here I gave Egypt as your ransom Cush and Saba in exchange for you in other words he gave these people of Egypt and Cush and Saba he gave them over they were at the expense

[26 : 53] Israel were saved at the expense of these other people come to that back to that a minute because he said you are precious in my eyes and honored and I love you I give men in return for your peoples in exchange for your life there's the great issue where is our witness actually where does it come from it comes from the love of God what's made us witnesses our own efforts our own brilliance our own pattern of life our own creation of the kind of lifestyle we should live our own obedience is it any of these things that really has set in motion our being his witness no it's his love as our redeeming saving God why has he loved us why has he saved us because he loved us why has he loved us we don't know to why he love me but

I know he loved me and I love the fact that he loved me and I love the fact that I am a witness because he loved me and because in his love he made me a witness and he made me and gave me a testimony that conflicts with the testimony of the world and that the testimony of the world cannot in any way undo God is saying I am giving you a watertight case as my witnesses I am giving you an argument that none can actually unravel or undo they can try it they can pretend they've done it but they won't because the only way they can do it is to uproot you and detach you from the love of God and because your witness goes right back to the love of God and your redemption it's a witness that testifies that God is love that God is not hatred and cruelty because you and I say if

God were not love if God were just strict justice we would not be a people of God we be people condemned one of the great evidences not only for the existence of God but for the love of God is that he has a people as well as the death of Christ on the cross the primary evidence certainly that is but people don't see Christ on the cross people don't read the Bible that tells them about Christ on the cross but people read the lives of God professing people and that's where they have to see the Christ of the cross and the love of God reflected in our own love for him as we witness for him we witness that he's a redeemer who redeems us from sin and you see that's why it's so serious what you find from verse 22 onwards in the chapter there where the whole emphasis change and the whole atmosphere of the chapter changes and you begin to realize that the reason that

God is talking about Israel being his witnesses by what he has created of them as a people going back to his love for them the reason he's telling them that now is because they have failed to live up to it but he says you have not called upon me O Jacob you have been weary of me O Israel you have not brought me your sheep for burnt offerings or honored me with your sacrifices you have not bought me sweet cane with money or satisfied me with the fat of your sacrifices but you have burdened me with your sins you have wearied me with your iniquities without going anything like as far as Israel all our open failures adversely affect our witness if you have somebody called to give witness in court and then that person comes out with something in the course of giving evidence as a witness that obviously contradicts the kind of thing he wants to present as a convincing case the judge is going to say about that person and sorry on the basis of what you say yourself your witness is not credible

I do not find you a credible witness and friends we always have to be aware that that is something to keep in mind for ourselves try as much as we can with God's help to maintain the credibility of our witness in other words don't backslide don't go away from God don't let your heart grow cold so that what the world sees is apathy or something like that on your part because that's what Israel did and God was accusing them of having failed to live up to what he had created as his witnesses of course we all fail we all have flaws we all are conscious of in our own lives not living up to the standard of God nevertheless it's important that the

[33 : 22] Bible's teaching and warning and the Bible's encouragement to immediately come back to God when we have gone away from him that is all bound up with our witness and its credibility so the evidence that we present that God exists that the God who exists as a savior in terms of redeeming us from sin but secondly in terms of looking after his people now here's another tremendously powerful point in your witness because as you witness for God as you are a witness for God by his own work of redemption by making you that one of the things that's true about that is that you witness for him in a context of many challenges and many afflictions and many things that hurt you and many disappointments and many discouragements and even persecutions but now thus says the Lord he who created you

O Jacob he who formed you O Israel fear not for I have redeemed you I have called you by name you are mine when you pass through the waters I will be with you and through the rivers they shall not overwhelm you when you walk through the fire you shall not be burned and the flame shall not consume you why for I am the Lord your God the Holy One of Israel your Saviour in other words he's saying do you honestly think that God is saying do you honestly think that when I have made you a witness that I'm going to leave you to the elements that hurt you that surround you that cause you pain do you think I'm going to turn my back on you when you're going through the most difficult times in your life don't be afraid don't ever think it because I have redeemed you

I have made you my witness and there's a whole area of teaching there in the teaching of the Bible that you can go into yourselves that we've touched on many times it is this it is the Christians bearing under affliction and the bearing of affliction and the Christians continuing witness in their afflictions you know Paul says a remarkable thing in Romans Romans chapter 5 where you find him talking about we tend to think well that's a great chapter about justification and so it is but one of the great issues attached to justification is how we deal with afflictions therefore since we've been justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand and we rejoice in hope of the glory of

God well that's not surprising because that's a product of God's grace this hope hope that we have as hope in the glory of God looking forward to the completion of our redemption but Paul is not content to leave it at that he wants something that applies to this life strictly as well what does he say all over he says we rejoice in our sufferings knowing that suffering produces endurance endurance produces character and character produces hope and hope does not put us to shame because God's love is poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us now whatever the theology of that is and there's deep theology in it but practically it comes down to this when you maintain in your afflictions your quiet faith in God people note that and people can't get away from the fact that there's something there that they don't have unless they're

Christians themselves that has to do with God because that is a witness to him that in your afflictions you're actually rejoicing in your suffering now that doesn't mean that the sufferings don't really mean sufferings at all but it means that there's solid ground there in which you can trust to God even your afflictions they're in his hand they're part of your redemption they're no accident and there are few things as powerful as going to visit a Christian in weakness on their sickbed hardly able to speak and as you bend your ear to what they're whispering to you they'll say God is good isn't that powerful where does that come from what is that evidence of what is that a witness to it is a witness to the love of

[39 : 00] God poured out in your heart a witness to God creating you as his witness he looks after his saved people want to finish by another point just very briefly the evidence that we produce when God has made us as witnesses that God exists that he exists as a savior in redeeming us from sin in looking after his saved people thirdly that he will destroy his enemies now you might say but surely that doesn't come into any relation with salvation well it does because that's exactly what he's saying in this chapter I am the holy one you redeemer I gave Egypt as your ransom Cush and Saba in exchange for you we're not to speak about the Chaldeans who trusted in their ships and so on I'm going to give them as well as a ransom for you in other words your salvation is accompanied at the same time by the destruction of God's enemies we were all his enemies until he turned us to himself yes that's not what I'm saying but what the Bible is teaching is at the end of it all in the judgment of God when God makes up his jewels when God brings all things to the rightful conclusion when you and God's people together will proceed to glory it will be at the expense of the lost of the wicked of the unsaved call them whatever the

Bible calls them the ark in which Noah and his family were saved was at the expense of the many floods took away the salvation of Israel from Egypt and through the Red Sea was the expense of Pharaoh's best the firstborn and the best of his troops devastated by death the salvation of the church in Revelation is at the expense of the great Babylon who falls and is cast into the pit you can't think of salvation without on the part of the lost condemnation I'm not saying it's easy to think about we don't rejoice over it we're not glad it's like that one sense at least but it's a fact and you know people ask the question and it's hardly the time to really raise it at twenty to nine but why did

God order Israel to destroy the Canaanites why the ordering of such a slaughter of the Canaanites because that is a huge problem in the eyes of those who want you to think that the God of the Bible is really not a pleasant God at all and if he exists then he's very cruel why did God destroy the Canaanites why did Israel Israel settling in the land of Canaan why was it at the expense of the Canaanite people themselves some people might say that's a very complex question to answer or the answer to it is very complex well in some senses maybe yes in other senses as simple as ABC because they were gross exceeding sinners in the sight of God that's why it was

God's judgment of gross iniquity bring forth the witnesses says God can any of the witnesses who object to such a thing in the Bible argue the case why God is wrong in giving people what they deserve is he wrong to do that is it such an amazing thing that God should actually bring what people deserve upon them no but it is amazing that he wouldn't do that to everyone that he didn't do it to you and me that he's a saving God that's the amazing thing the amazing grace that saved a wretch like me who once was lost but now is found was blind but now I see you are my witnesses says the

Lord let's pray Lord we give thanks for the privilege that we are indeed your witnesses by your own creative might you have brought us by your redeeming power to be your people we have not sought it Lord for ourselves and it is not oh Lord because we have been any better than others that you have given us that privilege help us we pray in our daily lives to live up to it to consider the great privilege that is ours and to seek your grace and help each day to be witnesses for you in the way we live grant your blessing to us now we pray for Jesus sake Amen