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OUR WITNESS

Pledge

To ^a advance God's purpose for his church by ^b bearing witness to Christ ^c at home and ^d work, at ^e school and ^f play, in ^g private and ^h public, in ⁱ word and deed, ^j for all our lives, so ^k that all might come to know Christ ^l whom to know is life eternal.

^a Eph. 3:10-11; 4:11-16; Deut. 6:7; ^b Acts 1:8; ^c Eph. 5:21-6:4; ^d Col. 3:23-24; Eccl. 3:13; ^e Psalm 11:2; Dan. 1:17; Luke 2:46, 52; ^f Eccl. 3:1-8; 11:9; ^g Matt. 6:1-6; 16-18^h Matt. 5:13-16; 1 Peter 2:15; Dan. 6:10; Psalm 96:1-13; 1 Peter 3:15; ⁱ Col. 3:17; 1 John 3:18; Titus 1:16; ^j 1 Thess. 5:23; Heb. 3:14; ^k Matt. 28:19-20; 1 Cor. 9:22; Titus 2:11; Phil. 3:8-12; ^l John 17:3

Scripture

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 end of the earth.

Acts 1:8

Lesson

Eureka!

Whether fictitious or factual, the story of Archimedes' discovery of buoyancy is at least memorable. The ancient scholar had been given a difficult task: to

discover if the king's golden crown was really solid gold, or whether the goldsmith had cheated a bit by mixing silver in with the gold.

Stressed and perplexed by this problem, Archimedes decided to calm his nerves by taking a bath. As he settled into the tub, he noticed that the water rose by the amount his body displaced. At once he knew he had found the solution. Forgetting to dress himself, he leaped out of the tub and ran through the streets shouting, "Eureka!"—Greek for, "I've found it!"

In that moment, Archimedes not only discovered buoyancy: he also gave every English speaker the excuse to speak Greek now and then. *Eureka* has become a way we express our enthusiasm when we find something valuable, important, even life-changing.

When you think about what we as Christians have found—or, more precisely, who has found us—it makes Archimedes' discovery look like next to nothing. The infinitely glorious God has made a way for us to enter into a permanent relationship with him: he gave us himself, suffered, died, and rose again in triumph over sin and death. He put into our hearts his Spirit who reassures us that we belong to him. The deepest cry of our hearts for satisfaction is answered perfectly by this God of eternal love, truth, and justice. The glory of his being is so great that nothing less than all eternity will be enough time to enjoy and glorify. Truly our *eureka!* should be most joyful, most exuberant, most compelling!

The Christian *eureka* is the joyful task of showing and telling others who God is and what he had done. We call this our *witness*.

A Biblical study of the concept of witness yields the following observations:

1. Witness is our original calling.

Long before Jesus ever uttered the words, "You shall be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8), humans were called to this task. From the very beginning, when God created human beings, he created them *in his image*, which means that they were supposed to reflect the glorious nature of God (Genesis 1:26-28). They were to rule the universe as kings and queens under God's kingship. Fast-forward to the present day—now that human beings have fallen into sin, and Jesus has come to rescue them from sin and its consequences—witness means even more: it means telling others what God has done to save human beings through the work of Jesus.

Witness is directed to non-human beings.

The Bible makes it clear that other beings besides God and humans exist. There are also spirit beings—many of them evil—called "gods" (Psalm 82:1),

“sons of God” (Job 1:6) (not to be confused with the one true God and Son of God), “demons” (James 2:19), “rulers,” “authorities, and “cosmic powers over this present darkness.” None of these beings were charged with having dominion over the earth, nor were they given the privilege of bearing God’s image in the way humans do. They can, however, wield great power (Mark 5:12; Acts 19:11-20), and are keenly aware of human activities (Job 1:8; Acts 19:15). So when humans choose to sin, they bring God’s reputation into disrepute before these other spirit beings who not only delight in seeing God dishonored (Job 1:9), but also bind humans’ hearts and minds to sinful practices (2 Corinthians 4:4).

Jesus’ work on the cross sealed the doom of these evil beings, whose leader is called the *satan* (“adversary”). By dying and rising again, Jesus plucked Satan’s weapon—the fear of death—right out of his hands (Hebrews 2:14-15). Through Christ, God broke the power of Satan’s tactics, “disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him” (Colossians 2:15).

When humans yield their allegiance to Christ, they uphold the goodness of God’s character. They serve as witnesses to beings both angelic and demonic, that God’s plan of salvation is wise beyond all comprehension. Paul puts it this way: “So that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 3:10).

Witness is directed to human beings, believers and non-believers.

Of course, it is not only to *non*-human beings that we are to witness. The most direct witness happens to other humans, both non-believers or believers.

Witnessing to Non-Believers

If a person does not know the facts of the gospel, witnessing requires explaining those facts to them. In the book of Acts, we find a pattern in the way the apostles presented the gospel. They would:

- (1) recount the historical events (Jesus was crucified and rose from the dead),
- (2) explain the meaning of those events (this means that he is the world’s true King, the fulfillment of God’s promises to the Jews),

(3) urge people to respond to the meaning (repent and be baptized).

You might find this to be a helpful outline for giving someone a simple but complete overview of the gospel. You can remember it this way: (1) something *happened*, (2) what happened *means* something, (3) what it means *requires* your response.

If a person already knows the facts of the gospel, witnessing might mean answering their questions or objections. It will certainly involve listening to them to discover which points of the gospel or of Christianity they find difficult to understand or accept.

Witnessing to Believers

It might surprise you to learn that most of the witnessing we do is directed to *believers*. Witnessing happens among believers when we remind each other of what God has done for us in Christ. It happens when we urge upon each other the proper response to the gospel—for example, forgiveness, since the gospel teaches that God for Christ’s sake forgave us, Ephesians 4:31-32). It happens musically when we sing songs that recount the gospel and its implications for our lives. Paul urged the Colossians: “let the word of Christ [i.e., the message *about* Christ, the gospel] dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God” (Colossians 3:16).

The main difference between witnessing to a believer and an unbeliever is the assumptions we make about who we are talking to. When witnessing to believers, we assume that they have embraced the gospel, so we encourage them to live out the reality they have embraced. When witnessing to unbelievers, we are assuming that they have not yet embraced the gospel, so we are urging them to do so.

Witness is a whole-person, all-of-life responsibility.

Christ did not come to save only part of us, but *all of us*. It stands to reason that if God has changed our destination from hell to heaven, caused us to be “born again” (1 Peter 1:3), and put his Spirit in us, that there is not a single dimension of our life that should not radically shaped by this salvation.

Witness involves both words and deeds.

The slogan, “Preach the gospel; use words if necessary,” misunderstands the nature of the gospel. It is true that a person can live out the gospel by showing kindness, forgiveness, courage, etc. But these things are meaningless apart from the *content* of the gospel, which is Jesus and what he has done to save us.

Witness requires that we know the gospel *and* how to communicate it.

If we (1) seldom *think about* the facts of the gospel or (2) fail to let our lives be *changed by* the gospel, we will also be highly unlikely to (3) *communicate* the gospel to others. Most likely, we won't want to; and even if we did, we wouldn't have the moral courage or infectious joy that would make it authentic.

On the other hand, if we make a constant practice of rehearsing the great themes of the gospel, if we form a daily habit of confessing our sins to God and seek to align our wills with his, if we are consistently learning what it means to honor Jesus as our King, we will not be able to *stop* talking about him! As the apostles said, when they were threatened to shut up about Jesus: "We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20).

The Apostle Peter put it this way: "In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:14-17).

Putting the Pledge to Work

1. What does it mean to witness?
2. What cultural factors make witnessing difficult in our day and region of the country?
3. What legitimate concern is behind the slogan, "Preach the gospel; use words if necessary"? At the same time, what is wrong with that slogan?
4. What is something you *can* change about yourself that would enable you to become a more effective witness?