

You Are My Witnesses

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I. Introduction

A week before Easter, I got a knock on my door from two men. They said they were walking around asking if people read the Bible. I told them that I did, that I actually teach Bible at Biola University. They gave me some materials and said goodbye. I looked over the materials and saw they were Jehovah's Witnesses and didn't think too much about it again. About a month ago, we got another knock on the door. One of the men said, "My name is Brian, your name is Adam, right? I came by a few weeks ago and you said you teach at Biola." He asked me a few other questions and mentioned that he had questions he'd love to talk with me since he knows I teach the Bible. I thought about saying, yeah, I'd love to do that some other time. But in the moment, I asked him if he'd like to get together sometime for coffee so I got his contact information and we eventually got together. Normally, in those situations, I do whatever I can to make those conversations as short as possible so I can get back to whatever I was doing. But I had started working on this sermon, and felt convicted about how I see different relationships and situations.

You see, when we become Christians, our identity changes. Our transformation by Christ leads us to be witnesses about him. So one of our identities is a witness. I want us to see this morning how our transformation by Christ leads us to be witnesses.

Our passage is found in the latter portion of Acts. The basic outline of Acts is seen in Acts 1:8 where Jesus tells his disciples they will be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Act 1-7 speak of the Gospel going throughout Jerusalem. Then in Acts 8 (as a result of the persecution after Stephen's death), the gospel moves to Judea and Samaria until Acts 12. In Acts 13, the Gospel then begins moving to the ends of the earth when Paul and Barnabas are sent off on their first missionary journey.

In Acts 22, Paul has returned from his third missionary journey. Paul is in the Temple and others notice that Paul is the one who had proclaimed Jesus and falsely accused Paul of defiling the Temple. As a result, Paul is arrested by the Romans to stop a riot from occurring. Paul then addresses those in the Temple. He tells 3 things about his life, which is characteristic of all believers. He tells of his life before Jesus transformed his life, he tells of how Jesus transformed him, and what that meant for his identity.

Acts 22:1-16

I. Who Paul was before he encountered Christ

Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense." ²When they heard him speak to them in Aramaic, they became very quiet. Then Paul said: ³"I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. I studied under Gamaliel and was thoroughly trained in the law of our ancestors. I was just as zealous for God as any of you are today.⁴I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, ⁵as the

high priest and all the Council can themselves testify. I even obtained letters from them to their associates in Damascus, and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished.

In vv. 1-5 of our passage Paul tells of his life before Christ. He is identifying with his audience. He tells them that he was just like them, he sought to follow the Jewish law, he wanted to be obedient to God. He tells them that he was so zealous for God that he persecuted Christians - who he thought were disobedient to God - he even went to Damascus to take Christians and bring them as prisoners to Jerusalem. Do you see the irony here? Paul intended to take Christians from Damascus and put them in chains to bring them back to Jerusalem and here Paul stands in Jerusalem in chains, as a prisoner. The one who intended to imprison Christians, is now imprisoned as a Christian.

God can change a persecutor into a follower. Paul is an example of God's mercy and can change the chief of sinners into one who follows him. No one is too far from God's mercy and grace.

II. Paul then tells about his encounter with Jesus (vv. 6-11)

“About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. ⁷I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, ‘Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?’ ⁸“‘Who are you, Lord?’ I asked. “‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting,’ he replied. ⁹My companions saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of him who was speaking to me. ¹⁰“‘What shall I do, Lord?’ I asked. “‘Get up,’ the Lord said, ‘and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do.’ ¹¹My companions led me by the hand into Damascus, because the brilliance of the light had blinded me.”

This is a familiar account. Paul was headed to Damascus as he mentioned and then a great light shone around him. He hears a voice from Jesus asking why he is being persecuted. As Christians, we are united in Christ, the church is his body, so when the church is persecuted, it is the same as persecuting Christ himself. Verse 9 tells us that it was not some inner psychological experience that Paul had, it was something that was visible to his companions, they saw the light but did not understand the voice that was speaking to Paul. Paul is then led to Damascus to wait.

III. Paul is then given his mission and new identity which is to witness about who Jesus is (vv.12-16)

¹²“A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there. ¹³He stood beside me and said, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight!’ And at that very moment I was able to see him.

¹⁴“Then he said: ‘The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. ¹⁵You will be his witness to all people of what you have seen and heard. ¹⁶And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.’

As Paul waits in Damascus, Ananias is given a vision by God (which is not recounted here, but it is in ch. 9) so he goes to Paul and restores Paul's sight. Then he tells him the purpose of Jesus

appearing to him. Verse 14 - The God of our fathers appointed you to know his will, to see the Righteous One, and to hear a voice from his mouth.” These are all things that happened when Jesus appeared to Paul just a few verses earlier. Paul saw the risen Jesus, he heard a word from him, and he knew his will was to follow him

In verse 15, we see what Paul’s mission and his new identity is - “for you will be a witness for [Jesus] to everyone of what you have seen and heard.” When Paul saw the risen Christ, when he was transformed by him, it was not to simply become right with God and hide that from others and live it privately. No, Paul was to witness to everyone who Jesus is. The idea that Paul is to be a witness is emphasized here (the other accounts of Paul’s conversion emphasize other aspects).

This takes us back to Acts 1:8, “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.” Jesus is alive and he is with us as Matthew 28 states. So he goes with his disciples as they witness about him, they do not do it alone. One of our fundamental identities as Christians is that we are witnesses of who Jesus is.

But what were the disciples supposed to be witnesses of? Luke 24:46-48 (remember, Luke wrote Luke and Acts) tells us, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.”

We too are called to be witnesses, just like the disciples and like Paul. Acts ends with Paul “welcoming all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.” That is the task left for us as well - we are to teach about Jesus, witness about him, with boldness.

So, the disciples are to witness about Jesus’ death and resurrection and what it means. As we see elsewhere in Acts and the NT, this is what the disciples witnessed to. Humanity was meant to live under the reign of God. But Adam and Eve sinned, and we too have all fallen short of God’s standards and as a result, we are separated from a perfect God. Jesus came to pay our penalty by dying in our place to offer forgiveness for us. As a result of his forgiveness, if we confess and turn away from our sin, our desire to live independently from God, and place our trust in Christ, we can have a relationship with him. But we are not just forgiven, we are freed to no longer give in to our sinful desires.

We are to witness to others that they too can have a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Because of his death and resurrection, we are forgiven and empowered to live lives characterized by righteousness.

In America, we have the notion of individualism, which is not necessarily a bad thing. But when it comes to our faith, it can lead us to think that faith is this private matter. I have my beliefs, but I don’t need to share them with you. That’s the mentality of our culture. But that isn’t what we see here - we see that we should share who Jesus is with others.

Now that doesn't mean we are obnoxious about it. We actually see the opposite here with Paul. Paul shares who he was before he was transformed by Christ. He identifies with his audience, when he says that he was zealous for God "as all of you are this day." He doesn't treat them in a condescending manner, he identifies that he wasn't too much different than them. The reason he is different now, because of Christ transforming him. So he first tells who he was before he was transformed by Christ, and then how Christ changed him. Finally, what that means for him now. It means that he is a witness of who Jesus is and the forgiveness and freedom that he offers.

It means we have to actually say something. People won't figure out the message of the Gospel on their own, even watching the life of a Christian won't be enough, somebody has to articulate the gospel to them by spelling out who God is, what kind of damage our sin has caused, and how each of us needs to receive the forgiveness and life that Christ offers.

Conclusion

We see from this passage that Paul's transformation is for the purpose of him witnessing to others about who Jesus is and how to have a right relationship with God through Jesus. Then one mission that we have as Christians is to witness to others about who Jesus is. The mission of West Valley is to "know Christ and make him known." Paul is to witness to *everyone* about what he has seen and heard. But if you are like me, I suspect a number of you have trouble telling others you know about Jesus.

Why don't we talk about Jesus?

- 1) We are nervous about saying the wrong thing, and we are worried if we do that it will bring shame upon Christ. On the one hand, we need to know what to say, the content of the Gospel, so we should read the Bible and be ready to share when given the opportunity. If we listen well, and love the other person and not seek to "win" an argument, then we won't bring shame upon Christ.
- 2) Worried about objections people might bring up. We are all worried that we won't be able to answer questions they have. Like I said above, it's good to know answers to common objections, which requires study. But it's also acceptable to tell someone, "that's a good question, I don't know the answer to that, but I'll check into it and get back with you." That's ok.

Ultimately, we cannot argue someone into a relationship with Christ. We can share with them, answer questions, and objections, but it is the Holy Spirit who must convict them, so we must pray.

Why should our transformation by Jesus lead us to witness about him?

There is the obvious answer that the Bible tells us we should witness about Jesus and tell others about him, which is good enough of an answer.

I think there is another answer that we see in other areas of life as well. It is the idea that we are naturally inclined to praise things that we love.

This is something we are all familiar with. For the past few weeks, I can't tell you how many of you I have noticed on Facebook or other social media talking about the Sharks in the Stanley Cup finals (there's nothing wrong with this by the way), it is how we naturally act.

C.S. Lewis (in *Reflections on the Psalms*) says it like this, "***all enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise . . .*** The world rings with praise — readers their favourite poet. . . players praising their favourite game — praise of weather, wines, dishes, actors, motors, horses, colleges, countries, historical personages, children, flowers, mountains . . . Except where intolerably adverse circumstances interfere, praise almost seems to be inner health made audible. . . . I had not noticed either that just as men spontaneously praise whatever they value, so they spontaneously urge us to join them in praising it: "Isn't she lovely? Wasn't it glorious? Don't you think that magnificent?"

We are doing what all people naturally do with things they care about - speak about them, tell them to others.

Lewis goes on to explain *why* we delight to praise what we enjoy "I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but **completes** the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation. It is not out of compliment that lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are; the delight is **incomplete** till it is expressed. It is frustrating to have discovered a new author and not to be able to tell anyone how good he is; to come suddenly, at the turn of the road, upon some mountain valley of unexpected grandeur and then to have to keep silent because the people with you care for it no more than for a tin can in the ditch; to hear a good joke and find no one to share it with. . . ."

As we deepen our love for Jesus, we should naturally want to speak about him to others. As we share him with others, it completes this joy that we have so it reinforces itself. We enjoy and love Jesus more, which leads us to share him with others more.

So what do we do with this?

1. Maybe you aren't sure *what* to share, and you need to be better acquainted with the essentials of the Gospel. To you, I would suggest, read the Bible, read Romans to become familiar with what the Gospel is. When I got together with the man who was a Jehovah's Witness, he asked me to share in 2 minutes what I believed, are you able to do that?
2. Maybe you know what to share, but you aren't really sure *how* to share. I'd recommend a few books on that. Just to give you some tips on how to do it since there is not one right answer. Sometimes we need to be direct, other times more indirect and ask questions, pique interest. But these books will give helpful tips on that.
3. Maybe you are sitting there and lack motivation to share Jesus with others, you don't have any interest in doing it. What you need to do is to love Jesus because the more you love him the more you will want to tell others about him. Spend time in one of the Gospels - reflecting on who he is. Spend time in prayer with him - not just asking him to do things for you, but speak to him as you would to a friend about this issue. The other thing to reflect on is the condition of your soul apart from Christ. And you must be convinced that apart from

Jesus' death on your behalf for the forgiveness of sins and his resurrection which enables you to live a new life, you would spend an eternity apart from God. And you must be convinced that living life under the reign of God is the best way to live. If you aren't convinced of that, it will be harder to share that with other people.

If Jesus has indeed transformed our hearts, it will lead us to be witnesses about him to others. Witnessing about Jesus is not something we do, it is who we are – we are his witnesses. May we look at the world around us and those who we know with our identity as witnesses in mind.