

A Witness Working on Us and with Us

John 15:26-27 (NIV)

²⁶ “When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me. ²⁷ And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.

Last week as we focused on Jesus’ ascension, a time where God’s apostles shouldn’t just stand around, staring into the sky, waiting for heaven to come to them. Instead, God gave them work to do: to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth, to testify about Jesus.

When you think about testifying, one picture that probably comes to mind is that of a courtroom. A witness is called forward to the stand to tell the jury and all those in attendance the truth of the events in question in order to establish the facts. The apostles are primed as ideal witnesses in the trial of establishing who Jesus is and what he has done since, as Jesus said, “You have been with me from the beginning.” (verse 27) They saw Jesus’ miracles. They heard what Jesus taught. They witnessed his death. They ate with the risen Lord, even put their fingers in the nail marks, their hands in his side.

As awesome of a testimony they had, you know that the prosecutors would go after any weakness that they saw in the apostles’ testimonies during their cross examination. “Peter, didn’t you once forbid Jesus from dying? In fact, isn’t it true that you denied even knowing Jesus – and you did that more than once?” “Thomas, didn’t you think that your fellow apostles’ story about Jesus appearing to them raised from the dead on that Sunday was too far-fetched to believe?” “Peter, James, and John, did you really see Jesus transform and transfigure on that mountaintop, or was that just a very vivid dream? You even admit that you were sleepy.”

As you can imagine the scrutiny that the first apostles came under, we know that we are not above that same scrutiny? Everything that we say and do serves as us taking the stand and witnessing about Jesus. Imagine the cross examination. Isn’t it true that you have cut corners in your job, called your boss, your teacher, a “jerk” when they weren’t in earshot? Weren’t you checking Facebook or playing a game instead of working or studying? Wasn’t it you who had that fight with your wife at Target last week? Didn’t I hear you begrudge having to help your son with his homework, complaining how difficult your children make your life? Wasn’t that you pounding on the steering wheel and using a singular finger in traffic on I-15 the other day?

Many times our witness about Jesus by what we say and do is a disaster. Lord, forgive me for when my witness to you and your constant and unconditional love has fallen short and failed to measure up. Forgive me for when my testimony has been evidence of my corrupted life, my life of sin, my laziness, my anger that seeks to wound, my defiance for those who are trying to help me.

But our failures in witnessing about Jesus does not negate the work that God has set aside for us. He still called his disciples to be his apostles, to be the ones to go out to the ends of the earth to serve as his witnesses – even with, and maybe especially with, all their short-comings, flaws, and sins. And he sends someone else to work along with us, as Jesus promised: “When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me.” (verse 26)

God the Holy Spirit has been sent by God the Father and God the Son to testify about Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit serves as a witness, testifying to the truth even to us of what God has done for all people. He testifies that Jesus is true God and true Man who truly did keep all of God’s commands for us in our place because our testimony about Christ by what we say and do falls so woefully short of his perfection. The Holy Spirit testifies that Jesus did complete his mission as our Law Keeper, our substitute. The Holy Spirit also testifies that Jesus’ death is the payment that God required for all our short-comings and failures. And so our countless sins and wrong-doings, all of our failed witnessing that showed our selfishness instead of our selfless Savior, are wiped out!

Whenever and wherever God’s Word is proclaimed, God the Holy Spirit is serving as the Advocate, the Helper, the defense attorney who lays out the evidence testifying that Jesus is who he said he was: the perfect Savior of the whole world. This means that any time when we testify about Christ, God the Holy Spirit is working right along with us, promising that his Word will never return empty but will accomplish the purpose for which it was sent. As we testify about Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit testifies with us.

Now, when we testify about Jesus, we don’t need some sensational personal story about how far you fell into sin, addictions, etc. nor do you need a story about how dark the world got for you for a time before you got saved. Your witness, your testimony, is not really about you but about the one saved you. Your witness is about Christ more than it is about yourself. Does your witness reflect Christ and what he has done for you?

Let's take a look at the witness Peter gave on the Day of Pentecost. Open up a Bible. There should be at least one if not two in every row by the red hymnals. Or pull up a Bible app on your phone. Get to Acts chapter 2. You've already heard already today the first 21 verses of how God the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles, that he gave them the gift to declare the wonders of God in different languages. When their ability to do so was called into question, mocked, Peter defended himself and his fellow apostles saying that they were not drunk, that it would be absurd if they were. Who gets drunk at nine in the morning? No, what you see before you is God keeping his word, words he spoke through the prophet Joel.

Peter continues his witness. He doesn't relate the miracles that he personally saw. He doesn't share his three denials of Jesus and his reinstatement. Peter's witness goes straight to who this Jesus of Nazareth is. You saw the miracles. You heard about them. This was God accrediting Jesus to also be God, the Messiah, the Chosen One. And, yes, he was handed over to you, to wicked people like you and me, and you put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But this was all according to God's plan. And then God raised Jesus from the dead also according to his plan, a plan of resurrection revealed and prophesied about through King David some 1000 years earlier. Just ten days ago, Jesus ascended into heaven, exalted to the right hand of God, that position of power and authority over the whole world. This event, this fact, assures you that this Jesus, whom you crucified, is both our Lord and our Messiah, our Savior, the Chosen One who has crushed Satan's head, who lived perfection for us, and who paid for our sins.

The people reacted to Peter's witness. They were cut to the heart. They desperately wanted to know what to do. God the Holy Spirit had worked on their hearts through Peter's words and Peter had an answer for them. This is how God saves you: "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call." (Acts 2:38-39) What Jesus has done saves you. God the Holy Spirit testifies to this same truth and by doing so gives you faith in his name to believe what he has done for you. He conveys to you the forgiveness Jesus won for you. Everyone who trusts in Jesus as the Holy Spirit enables them will be saved. This is the truth that the Holy Spirit testifies about, the truth of who Jesus is and what he does for us. That day 3000 people were baptized and added to their number as the Holy Spirit worked through Peter.

That same Holy Spirit who caused that reaction of the people and gave that forgiveness of sins to them is the same Holy Spirit working on us, with us, and through us today. You received the gift of the Holy Spirit when you were baptized, that as someone, probably a pastor, poured water on you and spoke God's Word, God the Holy Spirit changed your heart, washed away your sins, clothed you with Jesus' perfection, adopted you into his family as he put his name on you. That same Holy Spirit came to you when someone told you about Jesus Christ and all that he did for you – a life lived perfectly for you, a death died for you to take away your sins, a life raised back from the dead as a guarantee that he will raise us from the dead so that we live with him forever. God the Holy Spirit worked with that person, through the person, to make that happen for you.

You may not have been with Christ from the beginning of his earthly ministry as those first apostles were, but Christ has been with you since that first time the Holy Spirit came to you and changed your heart. He came to you through the Word, through baptism. This was the start of your new life in Christ. This is what you and I testify about. We testify that Christ has changed us by the work of the Holy Spirit. Jesus lived the perfection we never could. He has taken away our sins. He has brought us into his family. We call on his name because the Holy Spirit has worked on our hearts through someone else's witness about Christ. By God's Word, we know that we are saved. This causes us to work hard at our jobs and in our studies because we are motivated by what Christ has done for us. This causes us to selflessly love our parents, our children, because that is how Christ loved us. This causes me to love even my enemies, the ones who anger me, because Jesus shed his blood for them and for me.

When we testify about Jesus, the Advocate comes to our aid, testifying to the truth of who Jesus is and what he has done to save us all. We don't always see the immediate effects of the Holy Spirit working with us and through us like Peter and the apostles saw on that Pentecost Day some 2000 years ago, but he always is. This means that our testimony, our witness of Christ, is not all riding on our shoulders as if we have to come up with the right words and the right argument to convince someone that they should believe like we do. No, our work is to testify the truth about Jesus with the confidence that the Holy Spirit is working through that testimony, that witness, to change people's hearts. The Spirit of Truth, God the Holy Spirit, our Advocate, our Helper, will not fail to testify the truth about Christ. Come, Holy Spirit! Work through our witness so that many more will be gathered into your family. Amen.