

Introduction >>>

This morning is the last of our August sermon series on the four coordinates of Eternal Church. Today we'll be looking at Witness. And I'd assume this final one makes us the most anxious.

What is witness?

- Am I going to be asked to knock on a stranger's door in a strange neighborhood and preach the book of Romans?
- I've heard people go witnessing; I am not sure I could ever do that!

A witness is one who has experienced something and then testifies to it.

So then, when we talk about witness, we are discussing something that was first experienced.

Illustration: Hutchins BBQ

We went, tasted, and then, of course, I told.

Why would I wait in line? Because it is worth it.

What have we seen, tasted, and felt?

We are witnesses of the Goodness of God in the Gospel of His Son.

- We have seen His glory in the most unimaginable of ways and circumstances: We see His beauty, radiance, and worth in the willing humiliation of the Eternal King who left His throne and place, wrapped Himself in flesh and entered His creation in a food trough and went all the way to death on a cross.
- And we are not just witnesses of this historical account from a distance; we are those who have tasted and seen, experienced and felt, who were united in His death and resurrection, emptied and filled by the Gospel of our Savior, King, and Lord.

And again, that is WHO WE ARE, and then...therefore, to testify is what we do.

- BUT our Christian witness, and then ensuing testimony, is not **just** what we say about Christ; it is what we live.
- Those drawn to an encounter of the Love of God in the Face of Christ as their Redeemer cannot simply move on with their lives; they are captured by an infinite beauty.

And so then, our witness of salt and light is meant to be something that pierces dark places and seasons that which is in decay in testimony of the Beauty of our King.

This morning, we'll once again look at a few passages to see that our calling as witnesses is not limited to the NT but began in the first Garden.

I'll be reading our scripture as we go, but for now, please open your Bibles to the beginning.

To Genesis 1.

Let's Pray

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Purpose Statement

The Children of God are being restored into that which they have been created to be, to live as witnesses that testify to the glory of the Precious Stone of our Salvation.

Read 2x

[change slide]

Today, we will look at the following:

1. Ancient Witness
2. Restored Witness
3. Today Witness

[change slide]

I. Ancient >>>

Summary Statement

We have been created to testify to the Glory of God, but we chose to testify to our own glory.

In The Beginning

We know the Bible is one story, breathed out by God through the hands of about 40 human authors over more than 1,500 years.

- And so, the NT calling to be a witness is not a pivot; it is from the beginning.

Read Genesis 1:28

Man was made in the image of God, and we read in this verse that God BLESSED them, and then God sent them.

To multiply, to go and fill the earth.

To image Him throughout.

To represent Him to all of creation.

- To the earth, to the fish, to the sea, to the birds, and every other living thing.
- Humanity was called to declare the beauty and worth of the Creator.

So then, if a witness is one who has experienced something and then testifies to it.

Then, this was the office of man from the beginning.

Even before there was sin.

There was the call to go out to the ends and testify to the Glory of God.

Go out and be a witness to the earth, to all the created things.

- The position of a witness is not a plan B solution.
- It is and has always been the chief end of all things!
 - That is, to glorify God and enjoy Him forever!
- And God does not imprint man with this calling to be a witness of His Glory because He is on trial!
 - He is not anxiously calling people to defend Him.
 - Remember, this was before sin and disbelief.
 - He is inviting humanity to the joy of their breathed-in purpose.
 - To dwell with Him and be blessed, and then be sent out to bless others with the life and word of His goodness.

And as Christ will say later in Luke, if His disciples do not testify to His glory, the rocks will cry out!

- All of Creation testifies, all of it bearing witness of a Creator!
- But the rocks crying out was not the ordained way for His creation to know God in Truth; that is the privileged office of humanity.

But then we have the fall of man and his rejection of the Glory of God in favor of the Glory of himself.

The Monument of Man

In Genesis 11, we get the strange story of the Tower of Babel.

The story of a humanity gathering and saying:

Genesis 11:4 [4]“...Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.”

So man sought to build for themselves a city and a tower.

A tower built in order to make a name for themselves.

- That is, a tower for their own fame and glory.

A monument of stone that would declare to all of creation that we are like god.

- They rejected the call to be witnesses that filled the earth with His name; they did not want to be dispersed; they wanted to remain gathered and testify to their own ingenuity.

And God dispersed them.

And it goes on

And this danger remains for us today!

- We continually seek ways to set up towers that will convince others and ourselves that we are worthy.
- And in doing so we reject the transcendent worth that has ALREADY been breathed into us!
- We scramble and, in panic, seek to prove ourselves, instead of finding rest and joy in proclaiming the One who was and is, and will always be our Beauty.
- And humanity is confused and disillusioned when they can never find satisfaction in receiving the acclaim they thought would give them peace.
- And the reason is they are trying to hold an office they could never fill.

- They were meant to be witnesses and not gods.
 - And the problem is not just with those who would try to ascend; it is also in the hearts of the worshippers, who long to worship images instead of the One who is being imaged.

Even in church we can find ourselves in continual danger of these things.

- We do good works so that we might be known.
- We serve so that we might be seen.
- We look for public places and platforms for our renown.
- And we avoid and cover sin because it might diminish OUR name, with no concern about the name of the Lord.

And the monuments of man's religion will continually crumble, as the world wags its head and blasphemes the God we used as a brick for the towers of our own **acclaim**.

And it's because our necks are too stiff to see that in the Garden of Eden, God did not bless humanity so that humanity could live for their own name!

He blessed humanity so that humanity could bless all of creation as testaments to His Worth!

Witness, not god is our office!

We are created, and therefore we cannot bear the weight of the glory of the Creator!
 And we can be fully confident and sure that all those who seek to ascend to the throne that is His will surely fall.

Summary ReStatement

We have been created to testify to the Glory of God, but we chose to testify to our own glory.

Transition:

So then, how are we put back together and restored to our rightful office as witnesses?

[change slide]

II. Restored >>>

Summary Statement

God has laid a True and Better Stone of Help, that we might be Restored as Living Stones of Testament.

The Monument of God

Flash forward, and after a generation in the wilderness, the Children of Israel enter the promised land.

- And God tells Joshua to have the twelve tribes stack a stone as a monument to God's faithfulness.

Joshua 4:9

[9] And Joshua set up twelve stones in the midst of the Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests bearing the ark of the covenant had stood; and they are there to this day.

These stones were meant to be a witness to the generations of God's steadfast Love and provision.

- And because man continually rejected and forgot the Creator, these rocks actually did cry out and testify to the Goodness of God in His redemption and the fulfillment of the promise of the Land of rest.

And we see something similar in **1 Samuel 7:12**, when God had Samuel set up a stone of remembrance.

We know this as an Ebenezer.

Which means a stone of help; this stone was also meant to testify to what the Lord had done for them in their time of need.

- And Samuel was called to set it up as a way to remember what they had WITNESSED, in order that they would then walk in the truth of how god met them in their time of need.

BUT!

We also know that the stone of help Samuel set up was not meant to be the ultimate witness and monument to God's Covenant Love.

Rocks were not created to be the permanent office holder of Witness.

The True and Better Stone

So then look at this: **Isaiah 28:16**

[16] therefore thus says the Lord GOD, “Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation: ‘Whoever believes will not be in haste.’ (ESV)

We read that God would lay His own stone.

A tested stone. A precious cornerstone that whoever believes in will not be put to shame, as Peter writes in **1 Peter 2:6**.

And so, putting all of this together.

In the Garden of Eden, God blessed man and sent him out to be a witness to His glory, but humanity rejected God and gathered to build a monument that would testify to his own name.

AND THEN

In the second Garden, the Garden of Gethsemane, the second Adam, Jesus, obeyed God and instead of drinking the cup of blessing that was His, He took the curse that was ours.

- And in doing so, he was a monument lifted up in the Wilderness, that whoever believed in Him could be restored to their breathed-in purpose and office.

And that purpose has not changed in Christ.

Just as it was in the beginning, God did not bless humanity this time through His Son, so that those who would follow Him could live for their own glory!

- He blessed His people so that we could bless all of creation as testaments to His Glory!

Summary ReStatement

God has laid a True and Better Stone of Help, that we might be Restored as Living Stones of Testament.

Transition:

So then, what does it look like to fulfill the office of Witness?

[change slide]

III. Today >>>

Exodus 34:29

[29] When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand as he came down from the mountain, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God.

2 Corinthians 3:18

[18] And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (ESV)

Summary Statement

As we receive the continual blessing of being a witness to His Beauty and Worth, we then therefore testify through the peculiar fruit of His glory!

The Calling

Again, the Tower of Babel is the monument and witness of man's glory.

An Ebenezer is a monument to the glory of God.

So then, who will our lives testify unto?

Whose name do we stand for?

What will we build?

Acts 1:8

[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." (ESV)

The Great Commission, and then Acts 1:8, is our office restoration!

- We are living stones of His glory being stacked upon His Cornerstone.

So then where do we start?

Remember Genesis - the office of Witness began with receiving a blessing.

- Experiencing the Goodness of God, and then being sent out!

And so in Acts, the disciples had to first receive before being sent out.

- This is vital, because if we run out of here in our own power and goodness, we'll seek to build our own kingdoms. We cannot give something we have not first received.

Our Beauty is Derived!

Glory: Derived, Not Inherent

Illustration: Moon has no light of its own.

Its glow is derived, not inherent.

And in fear of being a little too clever, we could say the moon is a stone that reflects the radiance of the sun.

But also, in truth, we see this very thing happening in the Bible!

Exodus 34:29

[29] When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand as he came down from the mountain, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God.

Paul references this account of Moses' derived radiance when he talks about our own calling and purpose.

2 Corinthians 3:18

[18] And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

In John 15: Christ tells His followers that apart from Him they can do nothing.

- He tells them to abide with Him, to commune and fellowship with Him through His Word and Prayer, and to obey what He has commanded.
- And it is in His communion that His glory is seen through man.
- It is only through abiding with Him that we bear the fruit, the radiance of our Stone of Help!

Peculiar

For a minute, let's go back to Joshua 4.

Joshua 4:5-6

[5] And Joshua said to them, "Pass on before the ark of the LORD your God into the midst of the Jordan, and take up each of you a stone upon his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the people of Israel, [6] that this may be a sign among you. When your children ask in time to come, 'What do those stones mean to you?'

So think about the purpose of these monuments of God's faithfulness and help.

When people saw them, or when the next generation asked about their significance, it implies that they were strange.

Seeing a stone on the ground does not cause anyone to ask about what it means.
No, it is in the peculiarness of its placement that causes the questions.

Questioning its meaning would be natural.

Illustration: Hot Dog at a Rangers Game

Why would you do that! That is a strange thing to do!

The fruit we bear through abiding with Christ is peculiar!

It's OTHER and UNCOMMON!

It's confusing to the watching-and-waiting world!

And we say, not us, but Christ.

- He is the true and better witness of the beauty and worth of God.
- He was fully loved on the cross, not by man but by God.
- And he did something peculiar.
- He did something very strange.
- He stayed up on the cross.

And the religious thought, this is impossible.

It is confusing that someone with power would allow this to happen to themselves, and so THEY, the men of religious rituals, thought this man from Nazareth had no **real** power.

And they drew their own small conclusions: He was not God.

- When in reality it was the opposite.
- He was holy. Other. Uncommon.
- He was lifted up not for the glory of man but for the glory of God.
- He was the Ebenezer of God's steadfast love whom God laid in Zion for us to know Him.

And he calls us to follow him.

Self-denial is the peculiar testimony of God's beauty.

- And it continues to be very confusing to a world that leverages its power for the sake of its own name.
- It is strange to a world that uses power to erect monuments of its own glory.

But we, the church, His disciples, are not them.

As the kids say, we understand the assignment.

- We are other. Set apart.
- We have all been laid, or PLACED by God to be stones of His witness!
- We testify wherever we have been set to the goodness of another.

Who hurt you is a question for a peculiar anger response to something.

Church, may we live lives in our everyday settings that demand a very different question!

May people see us and ask in incredulity, “Who loved you?”

And in that moment we are on the stand, and ready to testify to an eternal Hope

That’s what happened in Acts 16!

Paul and Silas were in prison.

- They did not grumble and complain about the injustice of their circumstances; that would have been a common response.

But they saw themselves as being placed by God.

- And we read that they were singing.
- And then an earthquake opened all the doors.
- And the jailer awoke and saw the cell open; and he made a common assumption.
- **The prisoners have escaped! And he drew his sword to take his life!**

But then, he saw something uncommon!

Paul and Silas had not escaped!

And the natural question came!

- Why would you do this?
- Why would you live this way? Who loved you?

How can I be loved this way? How can I receive what you have received?

I am not saying we should all do something to be put in prison so that we can be witnesses...

However, there are other ways:

Kairos Prison Ministry - Why are you here?

Why would you pursue us in the place of our shame?

Why would you give up the freedom this weekend to enter into our valley?

And this is the office and calling of our entire lives!

The Miracles of Christ were peculiar to the people!

- The watching world was confused, and they said, “What is this unnatural act? And what does it mean?”
- Whose power does it testify to?
- And throughout we hear that these signs and wonders were meant to point to the truth that Jesus was and is the Son of God.

And in reality, what we know is that the miracles of Christ were not eternally unnatural! They were the restoration of that which was meant to be natural.

- And so the peculiar Good Works of Love that the Church is called to are meant to be signs that point upward.
- They are declaring what has already begun and what will be fully realized in the restoration of that which was always meant to be.

The fruit of man's rebellion leads to isolation and death.

- While the fruit of God's Grace leads to restoration and life.
- We bear witness to the goodness of the blessing we have received in Christ.
- Our deeds and words testify to another Kingdom and another King.

The watching-and-waiting world can see it in the way we love one another.

- In how we walk in compassion.
- In how we care for others, and especially how we treat those who can offer us nothing in return.
- The Posture of our King seen in how we use our power to build up.
- The Love of our Savior in how we serve those in need.
- The Beauty of our Bridegroom declared in how we walk in purity.
- The surpassing worth of our Great Treasure seen in our peculiar generosity.
- The compassion of our Wonderful Counselor, seen in how we weep with those who weep.
- The Steadfast Love of our Good Shepherd seen in how we pursue one another.

We are witnesses of Jesus Christ, the Alpha and the Omega, the Bread of our life, our Great High Priest, the very Word of God in the Flesh, the Rock of our Salvation, the Lion from the Tribe of Judah, and the Perfect Lamb of our Atonement.

And so...our lives testify to what we have witnessed!

Summary ReStatement

As we receive the continual blessing of being a witness to His Beauty and Worth, we then therefore testify through the peculiar fruit of His glory!

[change slide]

Conclusion >>>

In The Wilderness

The Children of Israel in the Wilderness did not testify to that which they had seen and heard.

- Their lives did not declare the Glory of the God who redeemed them from captivity, rescued them from the waters of the Red Sea, and went with them in their wanderings.
- Instead, they grumbled and complained.
- And they vained Him.
- And anyone who would have seen them on a normal day would have assumed that the God of their rituals was powerless and negligent.
 - Their words and deeds declared an empty throneroom.

Eternal Church - May it not be so among us!

This doesn't mean that we should fake it till we make it.

It means that we spend time considering the Goodness of Christ and walking with Him in His word and being melted by His deeds.

And we, by His grace, walk in those words and deeds as well.

We praise Him in the valleys, and when our stomachs are full.

And tomorrow morning we go to work, and work with uncommon integrity.

We don't gossip, and the world asks why.

We don't complain, and the world is confused!

We don't panic, and the world sees a peculiar monument.

We are those who have been blessed by God in Christ Jesus, and we then go out and fill the earth with His Glory!

We push against the darkness and season what is in decay.

Let's Pray

Consider

[change slide]

Consider:

1. Thank God for His Stone of Help! Our Rock of Salvation!
2. Who or what does my life testify unto?
3. Where have I been placed as a testament to the goodness of Jesus?

Benediction