

Joke: A teenage boy had just passed his driving test. . .and asked his father as to when they could discuss his use of the car.

His father said he'd make a deal with his son, "You bring your grades up from a C to a B average, study your Bible a little and get your hair cut. Then we'll talk about the car." The boy thought about that for a moment, decided he'd settle for the offer and they agreed on it.

After about six weeks his father said, "Son, you've brought your grades up and I've observed that you have been studying your Bible, but I'm disappointed you haven't had your hair cut."

The boy said, "You know, Dad, I've been thinking about that, and I've noticed in my studies of the Bible that Samson had long hair, John the Baptist had long hair, Moses had long hair, and there's even strong evidence that Jesus had long hair."

The father responded, "Well, did you also notice that they all walked everywhere they went?"

Better Week 4: Better Witness

Good afternoon church, today we wrap up our series, Better. Each week we have tried to highlight some of the ways that a relationship with Jesus can make our lives better.

The first week we looked at the impact God can have in our lives as we looked at having better priorities. When we put God first, the rest of our lives seem to fall into order. If we get this backward, the

most important things in our lives tend to suffer. Then we discovered that the people we surround ourselves with can have far reaching effects on who we become. So, sometimes it is important for us to focus on having better relationships to experience the life that God has for us. Last week we considered how a connection to Jesus can help us make better choices. We are largely the choices that we make, and as we begin the new year, perhaps we need to operate with more Godly wisdom. And today, we will finish our series by being challenged to live this year as a better witness.

A witness is someone who gives evidence in relation to matters of fact under inquiry. Maybe you have been a witness to a traffic accident and had to give your statement of what you saw or experienced.

The Bible talks a lot about being witnesses. Not in the ways I just mentioned, but rather witnesses to the power of the crucified and resurrected Jesus. And as a follower of Jesus, we are commanded to be witnesses for Christ. It is not really an option. In fact, it is the final instruction that Jesus gives his disciples before he ascends into heaven.

Part of being a Christian is sharing with others what Jesus has done in your life.

Max Lucado once said, “to call yourself a child of God is one thing, to be called a child of God by those who watch your life is another thing altogether.”

Being a witness is offering up evidence from your own experience that would validate that Jesus is who he said he is. The book of Acts speaks to this mandate that was for Jesus' followers then and for his followers that were yet to come.

Acts 1:8 (NIV): But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Jesus tells his followers that they will receive a helper called the Holy Spirit, and that spirit will empower them to be His witnesses. Then Jesus tells them that they are to share the good news about Him, their experiences with Him, with people everywhere.

The Greek word used for witness is the word *martus*. *Martus* can actually be translated as martyr. It is a word that shows up throughout the book of Acts as the early Christians demonstrated their faith in Christ to others, even by giving up their lives.

When Jesus references Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth, it was because he wanted them to know it was more than a gospel to just Jerusalem, but to as far away as they could imagine.

There is no place on earth that we are not meant to be advocates for, ambassadors of, and examples of, the powerful results of living a life that is submitted to the leadership and love of Jesus.

Billy Graham has said, “be a good witness by the way you live. The way you live is often more convincing than the words we say.”

There are certainly many things that Jesus wants us to do in response to his grace and forgiveness. Read the Bible. Spend time in prayer. Assemble together like we are today. But the most basic response to faith in Jesus is to look for any way possible that we might tell others about Him.

What is your story? And each one of us if you have been a follower of Jesus for anytime at all have a story. God has allowed you and I to be part of His story so that we can have a story so when given an opportunity we can share the story.

We must be careful not to become so removed from the world that is in need of healing and restoration that we forget to be faithful through word and deed, to be a witnesses to the love of Jesus, the mercy and grace of Jesus, the sacrifice of Jesus, the hope we have in Jesus, and the power of Jesus.

STORY: In one of the late pastor D.L. Moody's meetings, a man once testified that he had lived "on the Mount of Transfiguration" for five years – as if to brag about his piety. "How many souls did you lead to Christ last year?" Moody bluntly asked him. "Well," the man hesitated, "I don't know." "Have you saved any?" Moody persisted. "I don't know that I have," the man admitted. "Well," said Moody, "we don't want that kind of mountaintop experience. When a man gets up so high that he cannot reach down and save poor sinners."

Perhaps in this new year, we need to challenge ourselves to live with a better witness. We need to commit to giving evidence to the love of Christ by what we say and how we live day to day.

And hear this church, every believer is a witness whether he wants to be or not.

Often in the Gospels Jesus talks about what it means to be a witness. In fact, in the middle of his most famous sermon, Jesus tells his followers that they have a very important job to do. They are to be lights in the darkness.

Matthew 5:14–16 (NIV): “You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

I think because we are so accustomed to it that we really don't even think about how important light is? But without it everything goes dark, and the everyday things that we do become much more difficult to accomplish if we didn't have light to help us do those things.

STORY: You become keenly aware of how important light is when you have no access to it. When I was much younger, my family and I went to a few caves. Mammoth cave for one, but also a few others. As we entered one of those caves, it was lit up so you could see all the stalagmites and the stalactites. You know those icicle-shaped deposits that form on the ceiling and floor and going deep into the cave looking at the beauty that was before us. We had to squeeze through some small small areas. Jump over some puddles and then as we reached a spot looking at the wonderful

formations the guide just suddenly flipped the switch and all the lights went out. And we could see nothing. You couldn't see your hand before your face. We could however hear some moms and dads trying to calm down their poor frightened little ones. The only flashlight was one that the tour guide had. Thankfully the batteries were tested before.

The light never looked so good when you finally emerged from the exit of that cave. Little kids were clinging to their moms or dads, tears were being wiped away from some that were sure they were going to die. Nobody died, at least not on our tour.

The importance and the significance of Jesus' words to the disciples would have been clearly understood by those living at that time. If they wanted light, it had to either be daytime or they had to light something. They had to have a torch, lamp, candle, something that illuminated the area around them. Light was a precious thing that was not taken for granted.

When Jesus was born into our world, he came into the midst of the darkness. He came to a people who were full of sin and brokenness. and He was the source, the only source of true light.

The witness of His life says, "You know what it's like to be in the dark? You know how even a small light can change everything? That is what I have come to do. And when you place your faith, hope and trust in me. . .you now have the same light that originates with me living inside of you."

So, Jesus tells them, "A city on a hill cannot be hidden".

When Jesus preaches this message, he was more than likely in the hills of Galilee. In the Ancient Near East, a city was often built on a high point of the surrounding area. This made it safe from invasion. But it also made it extremely visible, especially at night. The placement of these cities was important because when someone was traveling in the dark, it was easily seen from far off as the only place that light would be present at night.

Some scholars believe that Jesus would have been speaking and motioning to a city in that area called Safed that was some 2560 feet above sea level and would have been visible to everyone around.

And church, you are a light to the world to illuminate the darkness and light the way for others. You are a city on a hill to be a visible place of refuge and protection. A lighthouse that shows those navigating rough waters where to find safety.

You should be as important as light in the darkness and as visible to all as a city placed on a high point when living for Christ.

One of the greatest challenges to living as a better witness is the fear of what others might think about our relationship with Jesus. Some of us might be embarrassed. Some of us might be ashamed. Some of us simply might be afraid of what others might say or think.

And the truth is in our culture today it is easy to become more timid about boldly living out our Christian convictions. But church now more than ever we must be willing to stand. Some churches are

forsaking the Scripture to become more relevant. But as followers of Jesus we are called to live differently.

And the Holy Spirit was given to us to give us the power to just that. It was also given so that we can see what others cannot see, hear what others cannot hear so that we can be a better witness.

1 Peter 2:9 (TPT): But you are God's chosen treasure—priests who are kings, a spiritual “nation” set apart as God's devoted ones. He called you out of darkness to experience his marvelous light, and now he claims you as his very own. He did this so that you would broadcast his glorious wonders throughout the world.

You would what? Broadcast his glorious wonders throughout the world.

The Apostle Paul was one of the greatest witnesses for Jesus. He offers us the reason for his willingness to live boldly for Christ in the book of Romans. He tells us. . .

Romans 1:16 (TPT): I refuse to be ashamed of sharing the wonderful message of God's liberating power unleashed in us through Christ! For I am thrilled to preach that everyone who believes is saved—the Jew first, and then people everywhere!

Paul writes that He is not ashamed of the Gospel. He will not be silenced. He will not hide His faith. The reason is because He knows that it is the power of God that radically transformed him and that same transformation power is available to everyone else and will provide salvation for anyone who believes in Jesus.

Paul is writing to encourage his readers to be better witnesses because there is so much at stake. The power of God is with us to strengthen us and give us the words to share the good news of Jesus with those He brings across our path.

People have asked how can we know that the Bible is true and that the events we read are actually true how can we have prove positive that the death, burial and resurrection actually occurred?

So, let me just address that quickly. I mentioned earlier that a witness is someone who gives evidence in relation to matters of fact under inquiry.

And the gospels were written by eyewitnesses that for 3 years witnessed his miracles, saw Jesus crucified, then encountered Him after His resurrection. Well that's great pastor but how does that prove anything. . .they could have easily just written that. And that is true, but let me ask you this. . .would you be willing to die for a lie?

I mean think about it. . .

Peter and Paul were both martyred in Rome around 66 AD. Paul was beheaded, Peter was crucified upside down at his request because he didn't feel worthy to die in the same manner as Jesus.

Andrew who took the gospel to Asia Minor as well as modern day Soviet Union, Turkey and Greece also was crucified.

Thomas who took the gospel as far east as modern day India died there when pierced with the spears of four soldiers.

Phillip who took the message to North Africa and Asia Minor where he converted the wife of a Roman governor so in retaliation he had Phillip arrested and cruelly put to death.

Matthew the tax collector ministered in Persia and Ethiopia with him we are uncertain some say he wasn't martyred we'll others say he was stabbed to death.

Bartholomew had missionary travels in India, Armenia, Ethiopia, and Southern Arabia and there are various accounts of him being martyred.

James the son of Alpheus one of the least three James that are referred to in the New Testament ministered in Syria and the Jewish historian Josephus reported that he was stoned and then clubbed to death.

Simon the Zealot took the gospel to Persia and was killed after refusing to sacrifice to the sun god.

Matthias the Apostle chosen to replace Judas took the gospel to Syria with Andrew and was put to death by burning.

John is the only one of the Apostles thought to have died a natural death from old age.

So, let me ask you again would you go through what most of the apostles went through for a lie.

They wrote as eyewitnesses of what they both heard and seen and gave their lives because Jesus was worth dying for.

Surely, they were not afraid to share the good news of Jesus with the people around them, even more they were willing to die for the One they were telling the people about.

We hold in our hearts the good news of Jesus Christ. The good news is that because of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, our lives can be transformed and made new. We have experienced forgiveness. We have experienced hope. We have experienced joy.

We are witnesses, but we must overcome our fear to share with a world that is in great need. . .The gospel needs to be shared.

Who is one person in your life that you can be a witness to? What is one thing you can do to be a better witness to the world around you? This new year, look for opportunities to be an advocate, an ambassador for Christ, and take those opportunities to be just that.

2 Corinthians 5:20–21 (NLT): So we are Christ’s ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, “Come back to God!” 21 For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.

And that church is good news.

The truth is, we will have a better year if we focus on better priorities, better relationships, and better choices... And because of the changes we've made in those three areas, we will naturally be better witnesses to the transformative power of Jesus.

Let's pray that God would bring opportunities to us and that the Holy Spirit would give us the power to boldly proclaim what God has chosen and called us to proclaim. Let's believe that God can empower us to be a better witness..