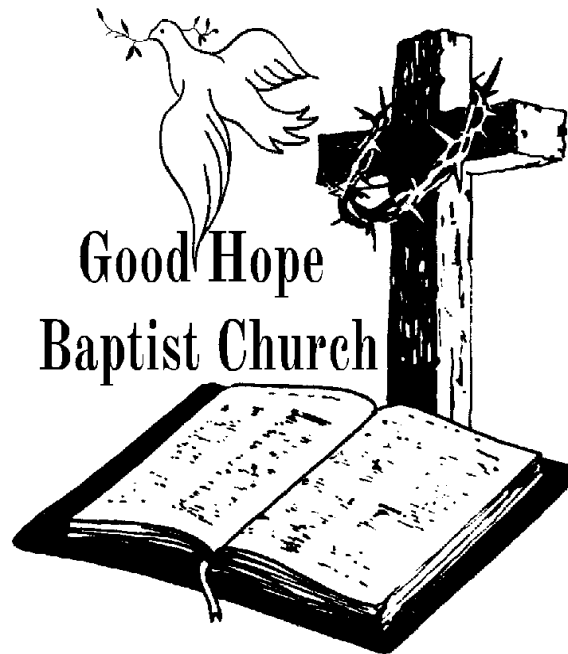


This Is Not A Time For Silence

Acts 1:8



Living Together In The Love Of God

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FOCAL Acts 1:8 ^(KJV)... ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

A young police officer was taking his final exam for the police academy when he came across the essay question. He read:

"You are on foot patrol when an explosion occurs in a gas main on your street. The explosion has blown a hole in the sidewalk, and turned over a nearby van. When you check out the van you discover the two occupants - a man and woman - are drunk. You recognize the woman as the wife of the Chief of Police. A man who's face you recognize, but can't remember his name, stops to help you. While you are pulling the injured out of the van you remember where you saw him before - he is wanted for armed robbery! A man runs screaming from his nearby house, yelling that his wife has just gone into labor. Describe in a few words what actions you will take."

The young officer thought for a moment, picked up his pen and wrote,

"I would take off my uniform and become part of the crowd."

I understand how that young officer felt - and you probably do, too. Our world at times seems to be upside down. The **Muslim terrorist attack of September 11, 2001** destroyed the Twin Towers in New York City, damaged the Pentagon, and caused the deaths of nearly

3000 Americans from all walks of life. How did America respond? Though initially the attacks led to wars on terrorist strongholds (**Afghanistan and Iraq**) ...

... it wasn't long before the fallen conscience of man normalized *public government sanctioned* strip searches - not of those likely to be terrorists - but on little children and 95 year old invalids at airports.

I often wonder how is it that such a thing can be. And yet the Scripture tells me that:

1 Corinthians 2:14 ^(HCSB) ... **the unbeliever does not welcome what comes from God's Spirit, because it is foolishness to him; he is not able to understand it since it is evaluated spiritually.**

Illustrate Those who have not internalized the Gospel we preach just don't understand the nature of God. I was watching a movie the other day when the main character - played by **Val Kilmer** - made the most remarkable statement. He said:

"It's ironic, isn't it? The Old Testament had a wrathful God, but people became uneasy with the concept and needed a best seller, so they came up with a New Testament; suddenly God was loving and forgiving. I'm old school, myself; I prefer the Old Testament. I mean you've gotta love a God who's unafraid to mete out a little vengeance when the need arises."

Now you might say, "Well, this was just a movie", and it

was - but someone had to write those lines. And the truth is, this is how most people who have not heard the Gospel view God. They think, **"We believe in the God Who is is a God of love, not like that Old Testament God. He's changed, and He loves each and every one of us regardless as to whether we call on Jesus Christ or not"**.

Dear friends, God does love us. The Bible says that **He so loved the world that He gave His only Begotten Son (John 3:16)**. But WHY did God give His Son?

God gave His Son over to stand trial and to be punished in OUR place. God did this because He is holy, without sin, and truly despises sin. The Lord made it crystal clear that:

John 3:18 ^(HCSB) **Anyone who believes in {Christ} is not condemned, but anyone who does not believe is already condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the One and Only Son of God.**

I read the most recent issue of our Baptist State newspaper *The Biblical Reporter*, and was really impressed by an article written by **K. Allan Blume** entitled *This Is Not A Time For Silence*. He wrote:

"Today a misguided movement insistently calls for the silence of Christian conviction in every (area). They falsely conclude that freedom of religion must mean freedom from religion. Their goal is to eradicate God from every public place. They continue to work diligently to eliminate any form of religious

influence from public life, especially where there is any connection to government. They are promoting "license," which is the idea that one is free to do anything they want. True liberty is the freedom to do what we "ought." The only hope of each human being is to choose God's best and experience His freedom. The only hope for a nation is for more men and women to embrace the truth of scripture through faith in Christ. This is not a time for silence. If ever the voices of pastors, churches and Christians should be heard is its now."

Our Lord Jesus Calls Us To Be Witnesses

Following His resurrection and just before Jesus ascended into Heaven our Lord gave a command to His followers. We call these final words His "Great Commission". Matthew recorded the first time Jesus spoke of this, saying

Matthew 28:19-20 ^{KJV} **Go** ye therefore, and **teach all nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: **20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.**

Just before Jesus ascended to Heaven He gathered His followers together one last time and told them:

FOCAL Acts 1:8 ^(KJV)... ye shall be **witnesses** unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

The Lord gave us His Great Commission *twice* in order to emphasize how important it is that we obey it.

In the first giving of the Great Commission Jesus emphasized that we are to **go and teach what He has commanded us to do**. We leave the confines of the Church building and **teach all nations**, which emphasizes we must neither be *racist* nor *lazy*. In the second giving of the Great Commission Jesus was even more specific as to where we are to **go**. He said "**You shall be witnesses unto Me**

**in Jerusalem ... your local community
in all Judaea the greater city
in Samaria in areas where you may be unwelcome
to the uttermost part of the earth ... everywhere else**

Word Study Where ever the Christian goes he or she is to be a "witness unto Christ". The word "**witness**" is a very interesting word. It is the Greek MARTOOS, from which we get our English word MARTYR. This word means "**to witness or testify to the truth of something**", but it also conveys the sense that "**the message may not be welcome**". Jesus wasn't talking about having a testimony service among other Christians, but He was talking about stepping outside of our comfort zone and telling others what Jesus did for us. They *may not welcome the telling*, but we are called to be witnesses.

**Our Lord Jesus Calls Us To Be Witnesses
TOGETHER**

Now when I mentioned *being witnesses to Jesus* some of you thought, "**How**". Then right after this thought a little thrill of *fear* went through you as you wondered how you could do what He commands. Look at what Jesus told His followers:

Context Acts 1:4 (KJV) ... **being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me.**

Before the individual Christian can be a witness - a MARTOOS - for Christ he or she must be equipped. Jesus said:

Context Acts 1:8 (KJV) ... **ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.**

The Christian is not called to be a witness in his or her own power. The Lord wants His followers to *gather together in prayer and obedience to His Word so that we can be equipped to be witnesses.*

This is why we come together as a local Church. We are not here to homestead a piece of land. We are here to prayerfully wait on God, to learn by His Word, and to get in touch with His Spirit. If you are saved then the Spirit of Christ is inside of you:

Romans 8:9-11 (KJV) ... if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. ... 11 But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.

The Holy Spirit of God lives inside of every Christian, but we as Christians only learn this and experience this as we come together with other like minded believers and GROW. This is why we are told in the Scripture to *gather together as Christians, to love one another, to encourage one another.*

Hebrews 10:24-25 (HCSB) ... be concerned about one another in order to promote love and good works, 25 not staying away from our meetings, as some habitually do, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

As His Church we come together to EXALT the Lord, **looking upward**. As His Church we love together, ENCOURAGING one another, **looking inward**. As His Church we grow to where we can be witnesses, EVANGELIZING the world, **going outward**.

1 **The love we show to one another is our witness to the world.** Jesus loves us, and showed His love by giving His life for us. As Christians we are called to *give our lives to one another* - to put aside our pride and to be like Jesus.

Illustrate Two men were digging a deep hole while one man - the supervisor - sat on a stump and watched them. One of the men in the hole looked at the other and said, **"What makes him special? We're digging, and he's watching."** The other man said, "I'll go find out". He climbed up out of the hole and asked the supervisor, **"What makes you so special? Why do we work and you watch?"** The supervisor said **"Experience!"** The worker said, **"What do you mean, "Experience"?** The supervisor stood up and went to a tree. Placing his hand on the tree he told the worker, **"Hit my hand as hard as you can with your fist"**. The worker drew back, and punched, but just as he punched the supervisor moved his hand, and the worker based the tree - and his knuckles. The supervisor said, **"Experience!"**. The worker - his hand now throbbing - crawled back down the hole. The other laborer said, **"Well, what did he tell you?"** The worker said, **"Let me show you...."** Looking around the hole and seeing nothing to put his hand against, he put his hand on his forehead and said, **"Now hit my hand as hard as you can with your fist..."**

We cannot reach the world for Christ - testifying of Him - unless we are in love with both Jesus as well as one another. When Jesus caught His disciples fighting over **"who was the greatest in the Kingdom of God"** the Lord gave them a wonderful example we all need to follow. Jesus went and got some water and a towel, and kneeling down, He washed the feet of every follower. The Lord said:

John 13:14 ^(KJV) **If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's**

feet.

If we are saved by faith in Christ, we are called to lower ourselves, to cast away foolish pride, and to serve one another in love. A bickering and divided Church has nothing to offer a bickering and divided world!

2 The love we show to Jesus is our witness to the world.

Context Acts 1:8 ^(KJV) ... ye shall be witnesses unto Me ..

Jesus said **"be witnesses UNTO ME"**. Our allegiance is to be what Jesus taught, what He has said and has been recorded in the Holy Scripture. Bible teacher and author **Randy Alcorn** said:

"{too many Christians had chosen to believe} whatever makes them feel good," {ignoring, denying, or reinterpreting Scripture to suit culture's current definition of love and tolerance}. "Hence, culture and the reader of Scripture become the authority, rather than Scripture itself. Faith becomes merely a collection of fleeting opinions, always subject to revision."

Jesus Christ was very clear. He said,

"If you love Me, you will obey what I command (John 14:15). If you obey My commands, you will remain in

My love (John 15:10)."

The love of Jesus drives the Christian. **We love Him, for He first loved us (1 John 4:19).**

We love Jesus for He saved us from a future real hell.

Hell is not a popular subject, but Jesus taught a literal hell. In **Luke 16** Jesus spoke of a rich man and a man called **Lazarus**. When both died they left this life and **one was comforted, whereas the other was in torment**. Jesus preached:

Luke 16:23-24 (KJV) in hell {the rich man} lift up his eyes, being in torments ... 24 And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.

This is the place of condemnation that all go to who have rejected Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. How long is hell? Jesus said:

Matthew 25:46 (KJV) And these {lost} shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

Hell is as long as is Heaven! The righteous (those saved by Jesus) go into **everlasting life**, but the rejectors of Christ go into **everlasting punishment**.

People say, "I just don't believe that a loving God would send anyone to hell forever". Dear friends, God sends no one anywhere. **YOU CHOOSE**. God is just, and this just God said:

Ezekiel 33:11 (KJV) ... As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die ...

Every Christian loves Jesus Christ because He paid our penalty, He died in my place, freeing me from the fear of hell and everlasting damnation. **The Lord is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9).**

Jesus Christ, speaking of hell, said that it was a place where **there is outer darkness, and weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 22:13), a furnace of fire where:**

Revelation 21:8 (HCSB) ... the cowards, unbelievers, vile, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars — their share will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."

We also love Jesus because He is transforming us by His Word *away from Revelation 21:8*. We who are believers in Him are no longer lost sinners, but we are Saints who sometimes sin.

What a glorious truth! Because of Jesus - because I said YES to His call - I am not headed toward death or hell. I walk with Jesus toward an eternity - a glorious eternity - that He has promised me. And as I walk, I never walk alone!

Practical Applications

Context Acts 1:9-11 ^{KJV} {Jesus} was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. 10 And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; 11 Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.

I am told by the commentaries that these **two men in white apparel** were the same two men - **Moses and Elijah** - who stood with Jesus on the **Mount of Transfiguration (Mark 9:4)**. Both Elijah and Moses were witnesses for the Lord in their lifetimes. They knew that Jesus Christ was coming, and they faithfully served Him to the end.

As the disciples stood gazing up into Heaven Moses and Elijah told them, in essence, "**Stop standing and staring. Jesus is coming again just like He left. Let's get busy!**"

Let's get busy loving and caring for one another.
Cultivate your love. Pastor **Brian Mavis** said:

"Your motivation for and the purpose of learning,

servicing, worshiping, giving, reaching, reading, praying, {and so forth} is to grow relationally more in love with God and people (Matthew 22:36-40)."

Come to Church regularly. Give as the Lord has commanded. Think about positive ways you can be "**witnesses unto Jesus**":

§ Can you minister with your brothers and sisters in the Lord **at a nursing home ministry**?

§ Can you - by the Grace of God - reach out to those in **prison**?

§ Can you who are elder in Christ **take the younger believers under your wing in private Bible studies**?

§ Concerning Bible studies, can you start a neighborhood Bible study where you live? Can you show the love of Christ to your neighbors?

§ Can you be available for **prayer meetings on Wednesday nights**?

§ Can you volunteer for the thankless tasks of the Body of Christ *before* you seek the limelight? Jesus said that your greatness as witnesses is not established by who is in charge, but by how you lower yourself in love:

Mark 10:42-45 ^{HCSB} Jesus called them over and said to them, "You know that those who are regarded as

rulers of the Gentiles dominate them, and their men of high positions exercise power over them. 43 But it must not be like that among you. On the contrary, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever wants to be first among you must be a slave to all. 45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life — a ransom for many.”

§ Can you pass out tracts - booklets (such as the ones produced for the Sunday sermon) - and other literature in the appropriate places?

What can you do to fulfill His Great Commission?
Grow by prayer and study of His Word - and then do what He calls you to do, trusting God to do the impossible.

Someone is waiting for the Gospel Message, waiting for a Christian to respond.

Illustrate In her book *The God Who Hung on the Cross*, **Ellen Vaughn** told how the Gospel came to a small village in Cambodia. In September 1999, a missionary traveled to northern Cambodia. Christianity was unheard of throughout that area. When the missionary came to one small village he was surprised. The people warmly embraced him and his witness for Jesus. One old woman told the missionary, **"We have been waiting for you for twenty years."** In 1979 this village was attacked and overcome by Communist soldiers who, planning to kill them, had the villagers dig their own graves. They knelt

before the holes they had dug waiting for the machine guns to cut them down. One of the women remembered a story her mother told her about **a God who had hung on a cross**. The woman prayed to that unknown God, hoping He would save them. Hearing her, first one then another of the villagers plead with the God of the cross. As they finished praying they opened their eyes. The soldiers were gone. Ever since that day this village in the Kampong Thom Province waited for someone to tell them - as Paul Harvey would say - **"The rest of the story"**. When he walked into the village the missionary went to fertile ground, for God goes before His people.

Our God is mighty to save!^{(from Doris I. Rosser & Ellen Vaughn, *The God Who Hung on the Cross* (Zondervan, 2003), pp. 35-37.}

FOCAL Acts 1:8 ^(KJV)... ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

1 Corinthians 2:14; John 3:16; John 3:18

Our Lord Jesus Calls Us To Be Witnesses

Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8

Word Study Where ever the Christian goes he or she is to be a "witness unto Christ". The word "witness" is

Our Lord Jesus Calls Us To Be Witnesses TOGETHER

Acts 1:4; Acts 1:8; Romans 8:9-11; Hebrews 10:24-25

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1 The love we show to one another is our witness to the world. John 13:14

2 The love we show to Jesus is our witness to the world. Acts 1:8; John 14:15; John 15:10; 1 John 4:19; Luke 16:23-24; Matthew 25:46; Ezekiel 33:11; 2 Peter

3:9; Matthew 22:13; Revelation 21:8

Practical Applications

Acts 1:9-11; Matthew 22:36-40

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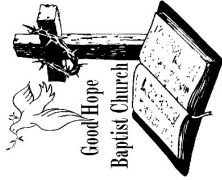
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Good Hope
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