

Bearing Witness

John 10:1-10; 1st Timothy 6:11-19



Witnessing and evangelism are uncomfortable. If there is one thing that believers and non-believers agree on, it is that we do not like evangelism. Why should we bother trying to witness? Isn't it too much of a hassle? Our society knows a lot about the gospel. There are churches all over Appomattox County. One cannot live here without driving by several churches to go shopping or out to eat. If someone wants to know about God, they can choose from a host of churches. Haven't we done enough to spread the gospel, not to mention our missions giving?

Things were different for Timothy. He was on the mission field, leading a group of new believers to witness to an idolatrous community. That is the in which Christians should witness. They were surrounded by people who had never heard of Christ Jesus. We turn on the radio and hear messages of faith, requests for the believing community to pray, and songs containing Christian messages—even on secular local radio. There is so much gospel around, why bother doing more?

Paul and Timothy lived a very different reality. Paul's words of witnessing and confessing Christ don't seem to relate to our day, time, and place. The gospel is old hat. Those who don't come to church know the basics, and many read their Bibles. If someone around here has not heard the good news of Christ Jesus, it's not our fault, is it? They must have not wanted to listen. Why worry about that? Is it our fault if they don't care to listen?

We could understand the need to witness in Timothy's shoes. We send missionaries to people who have never heard of Jesus Christ. We know it is important to let people know there is forgiveness and salvation in Jesus. Once they know that, is there any more for us to do?

We let people know we are Christians, and then we live as good examples. That's enough, isn't it? Paul tells Timothy to teach the wealthy to be generous and willing to share. Do our good deeds, share some of our abundance, be nice to people, and that should do it. As long as we live like that, those who are searching for God should flock to us and welcome Christ Jesus as Lord and Savior.

So why isn't it working? Why is it that living good lives, being kind and generous, and letting people know that we are Christians makes little difference in the growth of our church and seeing people accept Jesus as Lord? Why don't people flock to our churches like we would expect? Why are there so many around us who just don't go to church and haven't accepted salvation in Jesus Christ?

When I was interviewing at Rocks, you told me that Rocks was known as a caring church. Since coming, I have heard that description repeated in the community. I have heard others witness to the fact that there are good people here at Rocks. I have seen it myself. That has not led to growth or attracting visitors. Being nice has not made headway. We are still mainly comprised of the families who started Rocks 234 years ago, though many of those have drifted to other churches or attend nowhere. Many are just as good, kind, and generous as we are.

Perhaps we need to look again at Paul's words to Timothy. Paul had mentioned God's desire that all should be saved. Paul had spoken of Christ Jesus as Lord. Paul had mentioned being commissioned to bear the name of Christ Jesus before rulers, as well as common people. Paul mentioned Timothy's

confession of Christ before many witnesses. This had been a prelude for living up to that confession, making Jesus Lord of his whole life.

Following Christ Jesus as Lord relates to being sheep following the shepherd's call. The sheep follow the shepherd's voice, doing what the shepherd desires. We are likewise enjoined to work for God's desire that all come to salvation in Christ Jesus. This mission dominated Paul's life. This purpose drove all he said and did. It is the same essential mission that Paul lays out for Timothy.

As an envoy for Christ, Timothy was to be a model of faith, purity, love, and righteousness. He was to live out his public confession of Christ Jesus as Lord and Savior. This confession amounted to declaring that Christ Jesus had become the most precious and central aspect of Timothy's life. Paul had adopted the mission of carrying the gospel to the ends of the earth as the outpouring of God's claim upon his life. It was Timothy's task to live up to the same essential declaration of faith.

Christ Jesus as Lord means that all else fades in importance. Timothy was constrained to take seriously the challenge of making Jesus the master of his whole life. All else should be subject to Christ. All was entrusted to God, who would provide what was necessary for life.

Timothy was to lead by example. He was to correct with gentleness and respect. He was to model in all things the duties of a servant of Jesus Christ. How could he then encourage the rich to generously share their wealth without sharing what was dearest to himself? His greatest treasure, was not material wealth. It was good news of salvation in Jesus Christ.

Because Christ was precious, it was necessary and easy to share the gospel. The rich might share their wealth, but if they did not share the gospel, their gifts were worthless. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, giving without love makes one nothing. So giving the wealth of this world without sharing one's spiritual wealth is likewise worthless.

Paul mentioned material wealth, but his greater concern was the spiritual. Spiritual wealth is not gained by material means. It is gained by living out the gospel demands, sharing what is of true value. One does so by following the example of Jesus Christ. Pilate knew much about Jesus, but at the trial, Jesus witnessed to him that His mission was to testify to God's truth and offer of redemption. Timothy's task was to emulate the very example of our Lord.

Bearing witness in a church-filled county is not over-doing it. Placing a sign on the sanctuary to indicate our service hours is not sufficient. Living good, nice, generous lives does not cut the mustard. If it did, the whole world would be knocking down our doors to get in. The world would find itself in the arms of God. Rather, we are challenged to declare to this entire community the love and grace of God. We bear witness through the quality of our character and deeds, but also through our words.

God has not left Himself without a witness in this community. We disqualify ourselves as His servants, however, when we shirk our responsibility to share the importance of the gospel to our lives. Does our faith really mean anything? Does claiming Christ as Lord and Savior make a real difference in our daily living? Is our faith good news? If so, why are we stingy with this news of salvation? Nobody is knocking down our doors. What will we do about it?

—*Christopher B. Harbin*