

## WILLING WITNESSES #1 – 2 Cor. 5:14-6:2

### Practicing the Presence of God #10

Johnny sits down and begins to draw with his pencil on a piece of paper. Stark figures of rocks and caves soon appear on the paper as his nimble hand sketches quickly. Johnny looks to be anything but a preacher. But he is giving witness to his faith in his everyday, normal life. And Johnny's message will reach more people than any T.V. evangelist.

Johnny sketches out characters based on people that he grew up with. Thor who rides a stone wheel is named after his best friend, Thornton. Peg-legged Willy is named after Johnny's brother-in-law who lost a leg in World War 2. Clumsy Carp is really Jack Caprio, another boyhood friend and present business partner. The main character Johnny sketches called B.C. was developed from himself. Johnny just calls him a naïve slob.

Johnny Hart's 2 syndicated comic strips, B.C. and the Wizard of Id are the most widely syndicated in the world. B.C. alone is carried in more than 1,300 newspapers everyday. But Johnny Hart does not leave his Christian faith at the door when he goes into his office to work. He recognizes that His Lord and Savior is with him all the time, everywhere he goes. So when Johnny sits down to draw his cartoons, he is careful to sketch that which he feels will be pleasing to the Lord. He doesn't use suggestive speech or sexual innuendo for easy laughs. And when special times of spiritual significance come around, Johnny is quick to reflect them in his comic strip. Johnny feels that Christmas and Easter are special times when people are more spiritually sensitive so he usually has strips carrying spiritual significance during those seasons.

Now Johnny Hart has not been without criticism. The Los Angeles Times has often pulled his Christmas and Easter comic strips. The Atlanta Journal-Constitution and Chicago Sun-Times have dropped Johnny's comic strips altogether. But Johnny Hart doesn't really care. This man who has now lived 7 decades on this earth realizes that his primary mission in life is to be a willing witness of what God has done in his life. God has called him to be a cartoonist. So he continues to sketch his figures in a tasteful and humorous manner. And he remains today the most widely publicized syndicated cartoonist in the world. And in addition to his popularity with readers, Johnny Hart is also making a statement for his faith and convictions. So much so that recently a Jewish law professor wrote that, in his opinion, Johnny Hart has done more for our country's freedom of expression than any other single person.

The Christian who practices the presence of God in his or her life is going to be a willing witness of what the Lord has done and what the Lord means to him or her. Just as it is inconceivable that you and I could walk together throughout a day without introducing each other to our friends and acquaintances, so it is impossible for the Christian to walk through life without witnessing for the Lord if he or she maintains an awareness of God's presence. Whether it be through a prayer offered before a meal or just a word fitly spoken at an appropriate time or a complete testimony given when an opportunity presents itself, Christians who practice the presence of God in their lives are willing witnesses for the Lord.

The last paragraphs of 2 Corinthians 5 form one of the most powerful passages written in the Bible on this theme. The Apostle Paul informed the

members of the church at Corinth that they were called to be Christ's ambassadors in verse 20. Now this is an awesome statement. Webster defines an ambassador as *the highest diplomatic representative that one sovereign power or state officially sends to another*. The ambassador is *an official herald, messenger or agent sent on a special mission*.

Now it is simply incredible that out of all that God has created, He has bestowed this privilege on us. It is so incredible that we can't really understand why this would be the case. We even find it hard to believe at times. But this is the clear message of God's word. Those who have been born again into God's family as children of God and joint heirs with the Lord Jesus Christ have been called by God to be His ambassadors here on this earth.

It is the ambassador's job to represent the interest and deliver the message of the one who sent him. The ambassadors that have been commissioned by President Bush speak representing the President of the U.S. They cannot just make up their own message in an attempt to get the job done. *Look, I want to have peace in this region so badly so that it will enhance my career that I am willing to give you California if you will agree to a permanent peace agreement*. No, he must be the mouthpiece for the one who sent him. He represents the President. The ambassador carries with him the authority of the one who sent him. And if he is successful in carrying out his mission, he will be given great honor for his faithfulness.

So it is with each and every Christian. God has commissioned us to be His ambassadors here on this earth. We speak on his behalf with His authority as we give forth His Word. And to those who are faithful in sharing this divine

gospel message, God will give them great honor for their faithfulness at the judgment seat of Christ that is coming for each of us when we meet the Lord.

Now in the passage that we just read for our Scripture reading, the Apostle Paul gives 7 very compelling reasons why we should take very seriously our mission as Ambassadors for the Lord Jesus Christ. We are not going to be able to do justice to all 7 of these reasons this morning so we will plan to present 4 this morning and the final 3 next Sunday morning, the Lord willing. So let's begin to look together at 7 reasons why we should all be willing witnesses for the Lord Jesus Christ.

**First**, we should be willing witnesses because our mission is Christ's **Passion**. The Scripture reading that we just read together began with the words, *For Christ's love compels us. . .*

Can you imagine Dr. Zalmay Khalilzad, our present Ambassador to Iraq going over to that Middle Eastern hotbed with a nonchalant, lackadaisical attitude, looking at his trip as more of a vacation than a mission? Can you imagine him thinking *there are so many things that I have wanted to see in this area, I think I'll just schedule out an itinerary for myself. I'll go to Baghdad and do some shopping, then I'll book a cruise down the Euphrates River, and there are several friends that I'll look up and have dinner with. Then if I have any time left, I'll think about giving a call to President Talbani and see if he needs a hand with something.* I don't think that would happen, do you? No, Ambassador Khalilzad realizes that President Bush's passion is that the peace process be advanced in Iraq as quickly as possible. The U.S. is at war with terrorists. It is critically important that nothing hinder the progress of this

mission. So President Bush's passion for leading our country in eradicating terrorism makes Ambassador Khalilzad's mission in Iraq very important. The Ambassador had better take his mission very seriously or he is not going to be over there long. If the President found out that he was vacationing instead of doing what he was sent over there to do, he would be replaced immediately.

We must never forget how important it is to the Lord Jesus Christ for the gospel message that be spread throughout the world. Just think of the ends that He has gone to in order to see this accomplished. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Person of the Triune Godhead was even willing to leave the glories of heaven and come to this earth so that He could personally deliver divine truth to the human race. Jesus was willing to take upon Himself a human body. He was willing to be born in a lowly stable. He was willing to be raised in a poor family. He was willing to spend the majority of his brief adult life as an itinerant evangelist without a place to call home. He was willing to suffer rejection and ridicule. And He was finally willing to suffer the ultimate agony of being executed as a common criminal in the most painful manner known in his day. Jesus Christ was willing to go through all of these inconveniences and hardships so that God's truth could be known to the human race. He was willing to do all of this because of His incomprehensible love for us. The most familiar verse in the Bible says it with simple clarity: *For God so loved the world that He gave his one and only Son. . .*

Now as we grow in our faith becoming more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ, our heart should beat more and more like His. Our love should become more and more like His. Our passions should become more and more like His.

So it should be that we should have more and more of a burden for those who are lost in their sins and bound for a Christless eternity. One of the most primary reasons for our being willing witnesses for the Lord Jesus Christ is that His love should compel us to do so.

**A Second Reason** for our being willing witnesses is because of our **Personal Conviction**. Paul continues verse 14 – 15,

<sup>14</sup> For Christ's love compels us, **because we are convinced** that one died for all, and therefore all died. <sup>15</sup> And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

A person's actions betray what his real convictions are. If a person's actions don't correspond with what he says that he believes, then there is legitimate reason to question if he really believes what he claims.

Dennis found this out the other day when he went into a dry cleaning store in his hometown of Katy, Texas. Dennis was packing for a business trip and found a spot on a suit that he needed. So Dennis grabbed his suit and ran down the street to a store with a big sign in front of it reading *One-Hour Dry Cleaners*. Dennis opened the door and walked up to the counter. *Boy, I'm sure glad you're here. I need this suit in an hour.* The clerk looked back with a surprised look on her face, *I can't get this back to you until Thursday. What? I thought you did dry cleaning in an hour – that's what your sign says?* Dennis protested. *Oh, we really don't do dry cleaning in an hour,* the clerk explained. *That's just the name of our store.*

What good is it for a store to have the name *One Hour Dry Cleaners* if it takes them 3 days to do dry cleaning? It really doesn't matter what they say in the final analysis, does it? It's what they are able to do that is important.

All true Christians would agree that they believe that the Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross and was raised from the grave to pay the penalty for their sins. That is foundational to a person becoming a Christian. Romans 10:9 says, *9 That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*

All true Christians would agree that Jesus didn't just die for them personally but that He died for others in the human race as well. They would agree with Paul's statement here, *And He died for all. . .* I've never met anyone who claimed that Jesus came to this earth just to die for him – nobody else.

Now, if we really do believe that salvation is only found through trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ, and that the Son of God came to die on the cross for sinners, then we will be motivated to do what we can so that those who so desperately need to hear the gospel can hear it. Being a willing witness reveals the strength of our personal conviction. If we have no concern for the lost whatsoever, then we should be lead to examine our own beliefs as to whether we really do believe the gospel or not personally.

**In the 3<sup>rd</sup> place,** our **Perspective** in life should lead us to be willing witnesses. Notice verse 16 with me:

2CO 5:16 So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer.

I think one of the major hindrances to our being willing witnesses is a warped perspective that we so often develop in life. The Bible tells us clearly that in the final analysis there are 2 most basic ways to look at life. There is a heavenly perspective looking at all of life from God's point of view and there is an earthly perspective looking at all of life from the world's point of view. A heavenly perspective leads us to focus on the brevity of this life and the importance of preparing ourselves for eternity to follow. An earthly perspective leads us to focus only on the here and now and the accumulation of as many material goods as we can gather. A heavenly perspective leads us to look at fellow travelers on this planet as those like us who are born spiritually lost in trespasses and sins and desperately in need of God's saving grace. An earthly perspective leads us to look at other human beings as competitors trying to take away positions or possessions that we feel are rightfully ours. If we have a heavenly perspective in life, we will be willing witnesses for the Lord, but if we adopt an earthly perspective we will miss the richest blessings of life.

Pastor Leith Anderson tells of an experience that he had as a young boy. Growing up in New York City, he was an avid fan of the old Brooklyn Dodgers and hated the Yankees. One day, his father came home excitedly and told him that he had secured 2 tickets for a world series game between the Dodgers and the Yankees. The young boy was so excited because he was sure the Dodgers would win the game. But the Dodgers didn't win. And for years afterward, whenever he would tell about the game, he would just grieve that the Dodgers not only lost the game, they didn't even get one base runner to reach base. Finally one day, as he was telling his story to someone knowledgeable about

baseball, the person exclaimed, *You were there? You were at the game where Don Larsen pitched the only perfect game recorded in World Series history.* It was only then that it dawned on the now mature young man that as a boy he had been so focused on his losing team that he had missed enjoying one of the greatest moments in all of sport's history.

How often in life do we become so focused on the temporary blessings that God has entrusted to us that are so fleeting and that are going to soon pass away that we miss the greatest blessings that this life has to offer. There is no greater thrill in all of life than to be at the birth of one entering the kingdom of God. Just as those of us as fathers who have witnessed the births of our children have marveled at the miracle of birth, so the privilege of being a spiritual midwife to one being born again in the family of God is one of the greatest privileges in all of life. But we can miss out on so many blessings if we fail to have the proper perspective in life.

**A 4<sup>th</sup> reason** why we should be willing witnesses for the Lord is the power of the gospel. Perhaps the most familiar verse in this entire passage is number 17:

<sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

The Bible informs us that all people are born dead in trespasses and sins. Romans 3:23 says simply, *For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.* Our spiritual condition from birth causes us to be blinded to God's truth. We can't see our own spiritual inability – we tend to think that if we work hard enough we can do enough good deeds to gain entrance into heaven. There is

only one power great enough to free us from our spiritual bondage – that is the power of God through the gospel. The Apostle Paul confessed in Romans 1:16 that he was not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes. As a person hears the good news of the gospel message – that the Lord Jesus Christ died for our sins and we can receive God’s forgiveness and cleansing through admitting them and accepting the Lord Jesus Christ into our lives as our Savior and Lord – and as that person not only hears the good news but also acts upon that good news in faith trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ alone, God’s power is released into that individual’s life. He is born again into God’s family; he becomes a new creation in Christ; the old ways of life pass away and all becomes new. Such is the power of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

On Friday, many people of Irish descent will celebrate St. Patrick’s Day. If you were to ask most people who Patrick was, they would think him to be an Irishman who chased the snakes out of Ireland. There are 2 details that are wrong in this assessment. First, there is no historical record that Patrick chased all of the snakes out of Ireland. Ireland still has snakes even to this day like all the other nations in the world. And second, Patrick wasn’t even Irish. Patrick was born around 390 A.D. to a middle class English family. Ireland in the latter part of the 4<sup>th</sup> century was a wild land, much like Afghanistan or Iraq might be today. On one raid of Irish pirates into England, Patrick was kidnapped from his home as a teenager and taken captive back to Ireland where he was sold as a slave to an Irish feudal lord. This new master put Patrick out in the fields to work as a shepherd. Now Patrick had been raised in a Christian

home, but he had never found a personal relationship with the Lord himself. But now as a teenage slave far away from home like Joseph in the Bible, Patrick began to seek out a relationship with the Lord. It was during those long, lonely, cold, hungry months in the Irish hills that Patrick found the Lord and grew in his relationship with his Savior. He would later write in his confessions, *I would pray constantly during the daylight hours. I found that the love of God surrounded me more and more.*

6 years after his capture, Patrick sensed that the Lord was giving him a new direction in life. In a dream, he sensed the Lord saying to him, *Your hungers are rewarded. You are going home. Look, your ship is ready.* Convinced that God was leading him through this dream, Patrick left the sheep in the fields and walked some 200 miles to the Irish coast. This was a courageous move on his part because as a runaway slave, he would have surely been put to death if he had been caught. Patrick boarded a ship and worked his way back to England where he rejoined his family.

Back in England, Patrick studied for the ministry and was ordained as a priest in the church. But he was never fully content. His relationship with the Lord had changed his life so much that he felt burdened to share the good news of the gospel with others as God's ambassador. So 30 years after he had found safety and security back in his homeland, Patrick made an amazing decision. He decided to return back to Ireland as a missionary. To all outward appearances, this was a foolhardy move. His life in England was so much better than any that he could have had in backward Ireland at this time. And if he were recognized as the slave who had run away, he would be subject to

arrest. But Patrick's life had so been changed by the Lord that he just knew he had to share the good news with others. So Patrick voluntarily returned to Ireland. His 6 year stint in Ireland as a slave before had prepared him culturally for this new missionary venture. Thousands came to the Lord Jesus Christ through the ministry of Patrick. Many warriors laid down their swords for a life of peace. The human sacrifices that had become commonplace among the pagan Irish ceased. Nobody will ever be able to fully know how the history of Ireland was altered because of one man's life becoming totally changed by the grace of God to the place where he was willing to take seriously the call of God to be a divine ambassador.

Perhaps you are here this morning and you know in your heart that you don't have a personal relationship with God. Perhaps you are not happy with the direction of your life and are miserable inside. The verse that Paul wrote almost 2,000 years ago was true 400 years later in the life of Patrick and is still true to this day. If any person is in Christ he becomes a new creation – old things pass away and all things become new. Will you accept the Lord Jesus Christ into your life and become a new creation in Christ this morning?

Perhaps you are here this morning and while you have the confidence that you are a member of God's family you know that you haven't been taken your mission to be God's ambassador as seriously as you should. Will you commit yourself anew to represent the Lord Jesus Christ as He would have you to do?