

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

Practicing the Presence of God #11

John Wesley was a well known English evangelist who lived during the 18th century. He is remembered today as the father of the Methodist denomination. John Wesley was a man who knew what it was to practice the presence of God in his life. This is illustrated by an event that happened to him one evening after one of his speaking engagements. Wesley was walking back to the place where he was staying after preaching one evening when a thief came up to rob him. The thief turned to leave in a disgusted state having found only a little money and some Christian literature on the evangelist. But as he was turning to leave, the thief was startled to hear Wesley say to him, *Wait, before you go I have something to say to you. Some day you may live to regret this sort of lifestyle. If you ever do, I want you to remember this. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin.* The thief was astonished to hear these words, of course, and hurried away thinking that he had just run into some crazy mark. And as he was leaving, he looked back to see Wesley praying that his brief testimony might bear fruit.

It was years later that John Wesley was speaking at a Sunday service. Following the morning worship hour, the evangelist was approach by an apparent stranger who asked to speak with him. That stranger, a successful businessman in the area, confided to Wesley that he had been the man who robbed him several years before. He had never forgotten Wesley's advice to him. And sure enough, when he finally came to the end of himself and got

disgusted with the way that he had been living, he turned to the Lord Jesus Christ and accepted him into his life.

Now I think that we would all agree that witnessing would not be the first inclination that a person would naturally have as he was being robbed. Fear for one's life, anger at the personal violation, feelings of revenge and hostility – these would all be common and natural reactions. But if a Christian has an awareness that God's presence is right there with him, he needn't fear for he has the omnipotent God of the universe as his traveling companion. And an awareness that God's presence is right there with him would help to quell angry and vengeful thoughts as well. An awareness of God's presence gave Wesley such peace of heart and mind that he was actually able to be a willing witness during one of the most harrowing experiences that a human being can face.

Last week, we began to look at the importance of being willing witnesses for the Lord Jesus Christ. If we walk through life with an awareness that God is always with us, it is only natural that we would want to introduce Him to others that we meet. This is what being a willing witness is all about. To help us to see the reasons why we should be willing witnesses for the Lord, we have been looking at the Apostle Paul's instructions to the church at Corinth found in 2 Corinthians 5:14-6:2. In this passage we are seeing 7 reasons for our being willing witnesses for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Last Sunday morning, we looked at the first 4 reasons for our being willing witnesses:

*We should be willing witnesses because of the Passion of Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ loves the lost. He said that he came to seek and to save those who were lost (Luke 19:10). The Lord gave many parables during his ministry

illustrating His concern for the lost. As we grow in our maturity to become more and more like Jesus, the love of Christ compels us to be willing witnesses for Him.

*Another reason for us to be a willing witness is our Personal Conviction. ¹⁴ For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all . . . Every Christian claims to believe that Jesus Christ came to die for the sins of the human race and that it is only through believing in Him that one can become a member of God's family. If we really believe that to be true, we will be lead to be willing witnesses for the Lord Jesus Christ. Witnessing for Christ is a practical demonstration of the strength of our personal conviction in the gospel.

*a 3rd reason for being a willing witness is the Perspective that we should have on life. ^{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.

The Bible challenges us to live our lives with a heavenly perspective – to try to look at life from God's point of view. The world tries to lead us to have an earthly perspective – looking at life from a materialistic point of view. As we see life from a heavenly point of view realizing the temporary nature of everything besides the eternal soul and the lostness of people who don't know the Lord Jesus Christ, we are lead to be willing witnesses for the Lord.

*We concluded last week by seeing the power of the gospel. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

There is only one way for a person to completely and radically change his or her life – that is through the power of the gospel. We can make resolutions and commitments to change surface habits, but there is only one way to radically change our basic nature. When a person becomes a new creation in Christ, the old is gone and the new comes. There is great power in the gospel, power to change a person’s life. Remembering this truth encourages us to be willing witnesses for the Lord.

Now we must move along to our **5th Reason**. It is only as we are willing witnesses that we realize our basic **purpose in life**. Now everyone wants to have purpose in life. In fact, we could go further to acknowledge that everyone needs to have purpose in life. And people will do almost anything to find a purpose for life. Every Christian needs to realize that one of the reasons why he or she is still here on this earth is to be a willing witness for the Lord. One of the reasons why each of us remains here on this earth is to help spread the good news of the gospel throughout the world. Listen to what Paul writes in verses 18-19:

¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

The word “reconcile” means to re-establish friendly relations between two parties who had been estranged. The idea is that two parties who once had close fellowship had their intimate relationship broken for one reason or

another. When the reason for their break in fellowship was addressed and corrected, fellowship could once again be restored. Thus, they were reconciled to each other – they had their relationship restored again.

It is interesting to note that it is never God who is reconciled to man in the Bible, but it is always man who is reconciled to God. When God created Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, He created them in order to have intimate fellowship with them. Everyday God came to commune with them in the cool of the evening. But when Eve and then Adam sinned against God, fellowship was broken. Now when God came down for his daily conversation, the humans were hiding from him. Something was wrong. Sin had formed a barrier separating their fellowship with God. God had not changed. He was the same immutable God that He had always been and will always be. But Adam and Eve had changed. They were no longer the righteous people whom God had created. Now they were sinners, and a holy and righteous God could not fellowship with sinful beings. In order for fellowship to be restored that sin barrier had to be removed. God removed that barrier by means of the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the reason for Paul writing, “All this is from God who reconciled us to himself through Christ.” And in the next verse a similar message: “God was reconciling the world to himself through Christ.” When the Lord Jesus Christ paid the penalty for sin upon the cross of Calvary, the provision was made so that the barrier of sin could be removed that separated humans from God. This is a glorious message – that it is now possible for a person to have fellowship again with his Creator. One of our purposes in life is to get that message out. “For he has committed to us the

ministry of reconciliation.” We fulfill this purpose in life to be ministers of reconciliation as we are willing witnesses for the Lord.

In 1963, George Wallace who was the governor of the state of Alabama literally stood in the doorway of the University of Alabama preventing Vivian Malone Jones from enrolling as the first black student to a state university in Alabama. Laws had been passed in Washington D.C. prohibiting segregation in our public schools and universities. But Governor Wallace was not in favor of those laws, and he was determined to personally oppose their effects. That act of an elected governor brought national notoriety and further entrenched the racial barrier causing even greater hostility and anger. Riots ensued, buildings were burned to the ground, the 60’s are remembered today for social unrest. It was 33 years later that George Wallace awarded the first Lurleen B. Wallace Award of Courage. This award was named in honor of his beloved wife. With his political career over, the now wiser, older man publicly apologized on that occasion to Vivian Malorie Jones for his insensitivity and prejudice in that 1963 controversy, and Wallace then gave the inaugural Award to Vivian Jones for her great courage. As Mrs. Jones forgave Wallace and accepted the award, there was a moment of reconciliation that brought healing to the state of Alabama and to our nation.

When Adam and Eve sinned against God, fellowship was broken between the Creator and His creatures. Many tragic consequences of that sin have ensued throughout the generations that have followed – disease, natural calamities, pain and suffering, and the continuous death to which every person has finally succumbed. But in His great and enduring love, God has provided a

remedy for our sin. The 2nd person of the Triune Godhead came to offer himself as a sin sacrifice so that our debt could be paid in full. Now reconciliation can be realized. Verse 21 states this provision most clearly.

21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

God has made us to be ministers of this reconciliation. We have the privilege of carrying the message of reconciliation to others. This is a central part of our purpose in life.

A 6th reason for us to be willing witnesses is the position that God has given to us. This is found in verse 20:

20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

Now we looked briefly at this matter of being an ambassador last Sunday. We saw at that time Webster's definition of an ambassador: *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.*

Being an ambassador is an unbelievable privilege. Business people leave lucrative positions as CEO's to take less money for the privilege of being an ambassador all the time. Americans leave the plush luxury of their suburban lifestyles to travel to 3rd world countries where they have just a handful of the conveniences that they just took for granted before just for the privilege of being an ambassador. Why would they be willing to make such sacrifices?

Because an ambassador is the official representative of his nation. An ambassador has the opportunity of making an impact on the world that others simply cannot make. And an ambassador has the continual ear of the highest leaders in the world. If Zalmay Khalilzad were a CEO of a Fortune 500 company and he were to call the White House requesting audience with the President, he would have to go through many different people discerning whether or not his request were worthy of the President's time. Maybe, if his situation were dire enough, he might be able to finally get the ear of President Bush, but probably he would never have the opportunity to speak with President Bush personally. But if Iraqi Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad were to call the White House tonight with a pressing question, I'll guarantee that he will get right through. Because the ambassador represents the President, there is constant communication between the two.

If we consider being an ambassador for our country to be such a prestigious position, just think of what it means to be an ambassador for the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe. Just think of what it means to represent the True and Living God. Just think of the impact that being a willing witness for the Lord makes on this world now and for all eternity to come. Just think of what it means to have the opportunity of open and continuous communication with Him.

God has given to each one of us as His children the position of being His ambassador. This is an awesome privilege that we should never take lightly. And one day, we will all give an account of how well we served Him as His ambassadors here on this earth.

A 7th and final reason that we will look at is the **Precarious nature of life.**

We all live as if we have plenty of time left on this earth to do whatever we want to do. But even common observation reminds us that this is not always the case. And the Bible clearly teaches us that this is not the case. Paul concludes the thoughts on being an ambassador with the reminder that the time to be a willing witness is now for now is the day of salvation. READ 2 Cor. 6:1,2 (remembering that chapter divisions were not in the original)

2CO 6:1 As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. ² For he says, "In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.

I read a brief anonymous poem the other day: When as a child I laughed and wept, time crept.

When as a youth I dreamed and talked, time walked.

When I became a full grown man, time ran.

When older still I daily grew, time flew.

Soon I shall find in traveling on, time gone.

A wise person realizes the value of time and cherishes it, using every moment to its greatest advantage. This simple realization is what sometimes separates successful people from those who never seem to be able to achieve their dreams.

John Erskine, a well known author and lecturer, tells how he learned this valuable lesson from his piano teacher as a 14 year old young man. His teacher

asked him how he practiced the piano each day. John replied that he waited until he had an hour or so free and then he would sit down to practice. *Oh, no, no, no, don't do that*, his teacher rebuked. *When you grow up you are going to find that time doesn't often come in long stretches like that. Do your practicing in minutes whenever you can find them. If you have 5 minutes before you leave for school, sit down and play a song. If you have 10 minutes between chores, sit down and play a song. If you are waiting a few minutes before dinner is ready, sit down and play a song. Spread your practice through the day and you will be able to practice twice as long and music will become a part of your life.* John Erskine learned that lesson well in life. Later as a professor in college, he would write nearly all of his famous books riding on the train commuting between his home and the University where he taught.

The average person is a strange paradox. He lives his life under a weight of stress and pressure while wasting most of the precious time that God has given to him.

If we are to be willing witnesses, we must recognize that the time is now – for today is the day of salvation. The example that we follow is the Lord Jesus Christ who both used his time wisely and never lacked time for people. Jesus never turned anyone away. His disciples often did, but Jesus never did.

It was during the Civil War that President Abraham Lincoln was often criticized for his conciliatory approach towards the Confederate states. Some of this was understandable, of course, for millions of families in our nation were grieving the loss of sons and fathers. So there was a great deal of hatred and animosity that had permeated our country. It was after one especially harsh

criticism that President Lincoln shared the rationale for his approach. One lady rebuked him for speaking generously of his enemies. He should rather speak of destroying them completely. Lincoln calmly answered, *Why Madam, do I not destroy them when I make them my friends?*

What wisdom. There are 2 ways to destroy an enemy. One is to annihilate him; the other is to make him to be a friend. In either case, he is no longer an enemy.

Now I realize that there are times when an enemy will never become a friend. We, as a nation, are battling some hardened terrorists who are totally committed to our destruction. When this is the case, the enemy must be destroyed. And even God himself will one day put Satan and his demons in the Lake of Fire for all eternity with those human beings who have totally committed themselves to opposing God's rightful authority.

But God has also provided a way to make his enemies friends. He provided a means of reconciliation. The 2nd person of the Triune Godhead came to this earth to offer himself as a sacrifice for sin. All who receive God's gift of forgiveness through the Lord Jesus Christ are born again. They become members of God's family. No longer are they enemies, but rather they are now friends. God has given to each of us the privilege of sharing this good news of the gospel. We do so when we are willing witness for the Lord.