

We Cannot Afford to Look Away

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Texts: Acts 10: 34-43

Our text contains a speech given by the Apostle Peter to the Gentiles. When Peter says God shows no partiality. Here he is referring to the relationship between Jews and Gentiles, in the preceding verses he says, “You know it is unlawful for Jews to associate with anyone of another nation.” We often assume that they were forbidden from association. But this contrasts sharply with sources of the second temple period that say they did in fact have positive interactions. There are many different opinions and it’s likely that even Jews and Gentiles themselves had different perspectives. Reality is always more complicated than the record shows. Here Peter proclaims that regardless of laws about cleanliness or association, anyone who walks in the ways of the Lord is acceptable. Because God, needs, **witnesses**.....

CPE STORY

The kingdom of God cannot be built when we as witnesses are at odds over trivial matters. **You know what the largest hindrance to unity is? Division.** The kingdom of God cannot be built, when we are so concerned with the identity markers of others that we lose sight and forget to strive for the goal which is the upward call of God. The kingdom of God cannot be built when the visions of the builders are not aligned. Or when one person is looking left when the other is looking right. Verse 38 says, **God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with Power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil for God was with him. And we ALL ARE WITNESSES OF ALL THAT HE DID BOTH IN THE COUNTRY OF THE JEWS AND JERUSALEM.**

The apostles witnessed the good power of Jesus as he went throughout the land. As Christians We are all called to be **Witnesses**.... To qualify as a witness, you first must be able to see, understand, and recall events. Your recollection must reflect the truth of what occurred.

Upon his resurrection Jesus appeared to his apostles and those “who had been chosen” as witnesses. The entire community could not witness his resurrection, because the forces of evil and the spirit of fear would have again conspired to nail him to a tree. There are those who are chosen by God to become witnesses based upon their convictions brought upon by their transformation. In verse 42 **The text says, he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of living and the dead.** The word the English translates as testify should translate to **solemn witness**..... It reads “**He commanded us to proclaim to the people and to Solemnly witness that he is the one appointed by God...**”

Testifying may be a solemn act. There is a solemnity to the act of witnessing, because no matter what you see, good or bad, you cannot afford to look away, you cannot remain silent. **Witnessing is not a passive act;** this duty calls us to proclaim the good news of peace through Jesus Christ; even during the solemn moments. **For the word cannot be known far and wide, if those who believe in it do not proclaim it. The gospel of peace spreads when those who have experienced the peace that Christ offers, share it with the world; and, when those who have seen the worst of humanity, and all its suffering, testify as solemn witnesses to draw attention to the emptiness of life without the gospel.**

Let’s say you witness a crime.... You are summoned by the law to testify. The memory of the event you cannot forget. You show up on the day of trial and are called to the stand in a courtroom, they summon you to the bench..... And the bailiff asks you a question, **that you may have seen on one of hundreds of cop shows on tv.** What is it called, The sworn testimony? **Do you SOLEMNLY swear that you will tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God? Do you solemnly swear!**

How does God choose witnesses?

God doesn't care if you've been a Christian for 25 years or 25 minutes, in our faith, God anoints us with power to go out in the world and become witnesses. The Christian life is one where we must proclaim the Gospel in all circumstances. Which also involves listening. The Christian life is taking that sworn testimony.

The Spirit leads me to believe that God calls witnesses that refuse to look away. Peter knew the shame of looking away and keeping silent when he had the opportunity to acknowledge Jesus, Paul knew the shame of looking away as he stood by allowing Steven to be assassinated. But here they both become the earliest organizers of the Church **never**, looking away again. God calls the imperfect and the flawed to witness because they know how it feels to be transformed in the likeness of Christ, but they also know how it feels not live up to the Call of God. **We all know what it's like to fall short. God doesn't want perfect, God wants disciples with hearts that are ripe for transformation.**

Witnesses do not only see, but then they must proclaim the truth of what they have seen, calling attention to the good and rebuking the evil. God needs witnesses who refuse to call evil good and refuse to call good evil.

God needs witnesses who refuse to indulge in the blindness of the age, which leads to selective ignorance and denial of God.

What use is a witness who forgoes the gift of sight to save themselves from the obligation and pain of witnessing?

God needs witnesses who are willing to gaze upon the hideousness and beauty of this world without looking away. God needs witnesses who can gaze upon the cross, **AND** the resurrection. **But how can we appreciate the magnificence of the resurrection if we refuse to see the pain of the cross!**

As you stand before the place of the skull which they call Golgotha. **The lord is being strung up, upon that tree. The agonizing cries strike you where your soul resides. What are the crimes for which this man has been crucified?** Surely, he was innocent! Do you avert your eyes and deafen your ears, wishing to unsee the horror that lay before you, or do you bear witness? **When we gaze upon the cross, we are supposed to be discomforted, our Lorr didn't sacrifice himself, so we could look away....**

I cannot count the amount of times I've seen something that was true yet painful to watch and looked away because it was too much to bear. Out of sight out of mind I used to say, and I actually believed it. But when we put it out of our mind we do ourselves a disservice. And someone else pays the price.

When we witness the injustice of this world. When we see our neighbors persecuted for one thing or another. Do we ridicule them for what they cannot change? Do we say **IlliiiI** have done no wrong therefore it is not my responsibility? Do we blame those suffering for the plight of their situation? Do we justify the actions of evil men because others call it good? Do we look away preferring to imagine that it does not exist? **Noooo no no no..**

When we stand at the place of the skull, and see the crucifixion, we are seeing an act of injustice. We are witnessing the crucifixion of mercy, the crucifixion of love, the crucifixion of grace and forgiveness, the crucifixion of the poor, the crucifixion of all things good. But all the good that was crucified in the body and life of Jesus, **triumphs** over evil through his **resurrection. Which means that we, as SOLEMN witnesses of his death and resurrection, going forth, must vow to overcome evil with good by any means necessary so help us God.**

No matter how many times evil tries to break the spirit of the righteous, or extinguish the light of the Good, the holy spirit resurrects them because God is the source of Good. A forest may be burnt to ashes, but the forces of creation will resurrect what died to new life. **Beloved, we may be broken down by evil, but we will never be destroyed.**

We cannot fight what we do not see. One of the greatest deceptions, is the adversarial spiritual and earthly forces of this world convincing people they don't exist. The powers and principalities of the age do not stop searching, they do not stop prowling like a roaring lion seeking something good to devour. Which means there is no sympathy for the devil here. **What evil do I speak of? Beloved where do I start. It's everywhere.** We may look at the affairs of the modern age and be discouraged. Overwhelmed wondering how this culture of exploitation seems to have the upper hand? Why? Because **We who Paul calls this "great cloud of witnesses" have not yet mounted up with great numbers to testify against evil.**

Scripture shows us that when Jesus walked the earth, evil was **UNCOMFORTABLE IN HIS PRESENCE!!** Makin Angels sing, and demons shake in their boots. That's how we must be. We must be so prayed up, so cloaked in the Spirit of God, so washed in the Spirit of Goodness and love, that evil is uncomfortable around us.

But, the people of Gods body are too busy looking away, or at odds about doctrine, or our minor differences, like why a foot is for walking and a hand is for holding. God made us different for a reason.

Meanwhile evil runs amok, as children are dying in the streets of America and abroad, meanwhile illegal assassinations are taking place, and millions of Gods people experience food insecurity.

Beloved, is THIS NOT EVIL?!

If we as the body of Christ are the cloud of witnesses when will we start doing our duty as witnesses? Which I said before is not a passive act.

Ohhhh friends, we cannot afford to look away from the pain. For Jesus did not die upon the cross for us to look away. Jesus knew, that going to the cross, was the only way to gather enough witnesses, so the world would understand why he came to this earth, and who, and what he was fighting for. God commands us to be solemn witnesses. We must bear witness to the death and injustice, the pain and suffering, as well as the resurrection, life, and peace, never turning a blind eye to either. For we must be **witnesses, before** we can testify. We must be witnesses **before** we go out into the world, with the shield of faith, and the Gospel of Peace. We must be witnesses before we can vanquish evil, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Amen



