

1. You Will Be My Witnesses (3Q 2018—The Book of Acts)

Biblical material: Acts 1:6–8, Luke 24:25, Luke 24:44–48, Deut. 19:15, Acts 1:9–26, Prov. 16:33.

Quotes

- When the frustration of my helplessness seemed greatest, I discovered God's grace was more than sufficient. And after my imprisonment, I could look back and see how God used my powerlessness for His purpose. What He has chosen for my most significant witness was not my triumphs or victories, but my defeat. *Charles Caleb Colton*
- The Biblical prophet doesn't predict the future, but bears witness to the presence of God in history. *Nicolas Gomez Davila*
- Being salt and light demands two things: we practice purity in the midst of a fallen world and yet we live in proximity to this fallen world. If you don't hold up both truths in tension, you invariably becomes useless and separated from the world God loves. *David Kinnaman*
- Witnesses incur responsibilities, as anyone who has ever seen a traffic accident and had to go to court to testify, knows. *Erna Paris*
- God is a witness to anything done in secret. *Lailah Gifty*
- The heart is a silent witness. *Marty Rubin*

Questions

How would you define the purpose of the Book of Acts? What is the primary role of a witness? Why did Jesus have to tell the disciples so directly what their job was going to be? What was the heart of the disciples' message to the world? What lessons are we to learn from this chapter? What is the Book of Our Acts?

Bible summary

Acts 1:6-8 is the theme of the whole book. It's as if Luke has given his "concept sentence" and then spends the rest of the book explaining how it worked out in practice. Jesus explains he is not about to set up an earthly kingdom as the disciples want, but that he is calling them to be witnesses for him. Acts 1:9–26 records Jesus' ascension, the promise of his return, and the choosing of a replacement apostle for Judas. Luke 24:25, and Luke 24:44–48 record Jesus' post-resurrection appearances, and both times Jesus refers them back to Scripture that pointed to him. Deut. 19:15 speaks of the need for two or three witnesses to establish the truth. Prov. 16:33 is an interesting verse that states, "We may cast lots, but the Lord decides how they fall."

Comment

The Book of Acts begins with the risen Lord. Jesus is still there with his disciples, talking with them about the kingdom of God. But this is soon to change. Jesus is about to ascend into heaven, and the task of sharing the good news will fall to his disciples.

But the disciples don't understand. They are still thinking that Jesus will set up an earthly kingdom, the more so since he has proved his power in the most significant way—by

rising from the dead. Jesus' reply to this question is the theme of the Book of Acts. "You will be my witnesses," he tells them—"to the ends of the earth."

Undoubtedly the disciples did not understand what he meant at first. But the joy of knowing Jesus, their resurrected Lord, could not be contained. They told everyone they met. And in so doing they shared their experiences with Jesus, his words and actions. They need no convincing in accepting the assignment Jesus gave them. The good news of salvation sent them out, the resurrection was the proof, and the hope was Jesus' return. It was a simple yet profound and transformational message.

That the disciples were credible witnesses is obvious from the success that resulted. They were filled with the convicting power of the Holy Spirit as they repeated their own experience. The word used for "witness" means "one who testifies," and it was their personal testimony that was so impressive. As John says in the introduction to his first epistle, "This letter is about the Word of life which existed from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our very own eyes and gazed upon, and which our hands have touched. This Life was revealed to us; we saw it and give evidence about it. We are telling you about the One who is Eternal Life, who was with the Father, and who was revealed to us. What we have seen and heard we are now explaining to you..." 1 John 1:1-3 FBV.

In other words, each of the disciples could tell their own story of "what Jesus means to me." Here is something we need to focus on as we look through Acts: it is how the Holy Spirit worked through those willing witnesses and achieved so many incredible *Acts*! While we live in different times, and the name of Jesus is not "new" to people, we still have a message to share, a personal testimony of how the Good news is good for us individually, and a description of the blessed hope that is all our own.

Ellen White Comments

The Saviour knew that no argument, however logical, would melt hard hearts or break through the crust of worldliness and selfishness. He knew that His disciples must receive the heavenly endowment; that the gospel would be effective only as it was proclaimed by hearts made warm and lips made eloquent by a living knowledge of Him who is the way, the truth, and the life. The work committed to the disciples would require great efficiency; for the tide of evil ran deep and strong against them. A vigilant, determined leader was in command of the forces of darkness, and the followers of Christ could battle for the right only through the help that God, by His Spirit, would give them. {AA 31}

"Ye shall be witnesses unto Me." [Acts 1:8.] These words of Jesus have lost none of their force. Our Saviour calls for faithful witnesses in these days of religious formalism; but how few, even among the professed ambassadors for Christ, are ready to give a faithful, personal testimony for their Master! Many can tell what the great and good men of generations past have done, and dared, and suffered, and enjoyed. They become eloquent in setting forth the power of the gospel, which has enabled others to rejoice in trying conflicts, and to stand firm against fierce temptations. But while so earnest in bringing forward other Christians as witnesses for Jesus, they seem to have no fresh, timely experience of their own to relate. {GW 273.1}