

CALLED TO BE CHRIST'S WITNESSES

Called to perceive by faith and to testify of the unseen works of God amidst the things that are seen.

The purpose of these studies designed to be used in Circuit meetings is to lead Pastors deeper into the Word of God and the Confessions of our Church so that together we are strengthened in our witness for Christ. All of Scripture points to Jesus, crucified and raised from the dead for us. Our Confessions help us keep "Christ – for you!" at the center of our life, our ministry and proclamation.

In each study, we will ask and seek to answer two basic questions:

1. What has God given us to witness, that is to see in the Scriptures about Himself and us?
2. What then is to be the content of our witness, that is, our testimony of these things when we bring, in the Gospel, Christ's healing to broken people, forgiveness for the sinner and life for the dead?

What we see and experience raises questions that can only be answered in the Word of God, answer that are received through faith, not by sight or experience.

The basis for these studies flows from our charge to be -

God's witnesses to the end of the earth ...

So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:6-8).

Every human life since the fall of Adam and Eve is bound by sin to the road of sin, a road that only leads to death. Christ entered in upon this road and traveled it all the way to its final destination so that He might be for us the intersection of forgiveness and eternal life.

As witnesses to a world bound on the road of sin and death, we are to bring, offer and give this blessed intersection of forgiveness and life in Jesus Christ. This intersection is found every time the Gospel of God in Jesus Christ is faithfully proclaimed. At this intersection the way of sin and death is crossed by the way of forgiveness and eternal life, the way of unbelief is met by the way of faith.

At this intersection, the Word of God works faith or the hearer rejects this Word in unbelief. Here at this intersection either we confess sin and receive grace or we desire the sin and refuse the grace.

Every Christian knows this intersection because the Christian life is one of daily returning in repentance to our Baptism that we may be raised to new life in Christ.

The Christian Pastor is called to be a witness of God's work in Jesus Christ in the lives of all people, both inside and outside the church. He has a testimony from God, specifically for those on the road of sin and death and also for those who have been resurrected to new life upon the way of faith and life everlasting. He is a witness to those who are struggling in the faith and to those hurting and dying in sin.

"You will be my witnesses," Jesus said. Certainly all Christians are witnesses – Jesus makes a simple statement of fact that we are witnesses wherever God takes us.

What is the content of that witness?

What is God's goal for the Pastor's witness?

He is specifically called to be bring the “intersection of life” in Christ even when surrounded by the signs of death.

“You will be my witnesses... to the end of the earth,” Jesus said. Literally, that’s “as far as the last of the earth.” As far as there are people, as long as the earth lasts, to the last person, or to the person at their last, at the “end of their rope,” all are included.

The challenge in bearing witness comes in that we cannot always see with our physical eyes the work God does at the “intersection of life” with those on the road of death. We have only His Word to bear witness and tell us what is taking place. St. Paul testifies to this truth in a chapter from Second Corinthians that is all about ministry (2 Corinthians 4).

Looking not to the seen but the unseen ...

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

The contrast here is between what our eyes can see and what we hear in God’s Word. “Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed,” Jesus told Thomas (John 20:29). “Faith comes from hearing,” Paul writes, “and hearing by the message of Christ.” (Romans 10:14). As God’s witnesses we bear witness through His Word to those things that we do not and cannot see with physical eyes – the eternally glorious works of God for us even in the midst what we can see. He has sent us as witnesses to the unseen works of God because all that is seen in this world will all pass way. We are witnesses to the unseen intersection of our Savior’s grace and life with those who are traveling the seen and felt way of sin and death. “The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the Word of the Lord abides forever, and this is the Word that was evangelized to you.” (1 Peter 1:25) “Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here,” Jesus said, “when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live” (John 5:25). Jesus’ Word itself speaks life! Jesus’ Word works life in the midst of death and this in the intersection we bear witness to.

The Christian Pastor is called to speak that Word, to confess the Living Lord Jesus, to testify and to bear witness to all that Christ has done. He has an intersecting Word of life to those in the midst of dying, an intersecting Word of forgiveness to those in the midst of being broken by sin, an intersecting Word of hope to those in the midst of hopelessness, an intersecting Word of good news to the condemned, an intersecting Word that creates faith where once there was only doubt, an intersecting Word that does what it says in the midst of all kinds of other words that in the end accomplish nothing. The work this intersecting Word does will never be fully seen by physical eyes, but it is eternal and seen by Him who fills hearts with His eternal presence through faith in Jesus Christ.

- So how is a Christian Pastor God’s witness?
- How does he testify to the unseen eternal works of God in the midst of the temporal things that are seen?
- Examining the Scriptures and our Confession, what are these unseen works of God? How are they done?
- What is God’s goal by these unseen works?
- What struggles does the Pastor face in proclaiming these works of God?
- How does this comfort broken sinners? Both long term believers and those in whom the Holy Spirit is only beginning His work?
- How do these promises strengthen and encourage Pastors for their work?

This series of studies is designed with the hope that it will help us all explore God's answers, and thus our witness, to these central questions in a true theology of the Cross.¹

GOD'S WITNESSES TO ...

- 1. ... the unseen works of GOD'S WORD ...**
 - 2. ... the unseen works of GOD THE FATHER ...**
 - 3. ... the unseen works of GOD THE SON ...**
 - 4. ... the unseen works of GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT ...**
 - 5. ... the unseen works of God through the LAW AND THE GOSPEL ...**
 - 6. ... the unseen works of God in THE SACRAMENTS ...**
 - 7. ... the unseen works of God IN WORSHIP ...**
 - 8. ... the unseen works of God IN PRAYER ...**
 - 9. ... the unseen works of God IN VOCATION ...**
- ... amidst the things that are seen.**

¹ "Witness" is the first element in our Synod's present three-fold emphasis: Witness, Mercy and Life Together. Mercy and Life Together may form the basis for a future series of these studies.