

June 16, 2013  
Church Planting

*Is There a Witness in the House?*  
Acts 4:1-22

**Opening words:** You know the story. Jesus was executed on a Friday. Everyone thought it was over. However, everyone was wrong. It was just beginning. On Sunday morning a few women showed up at his tomb to pay their final respects. They made the discovery that changed the world. Jesus was alive! For forty days he walked the face of this world in his resurrected state. During that sacred time period, he did two things. First, he proved his was a bodily resurrection. In other words, he wasn't a ghost. Second, he taught about the Kingdom of God. Next, Jesus ascended into heaven and entrusted the ministry to the disciples. On their own, the task of evangelizing the world seemed impossible but when the Holy Spirit arrived all things seemed possible. The church was created and the divine helper was changing lives. On a single day 3,000 people claimed the name of Jesus and were saved. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teachings, the fellowship and to worship. The apostles were changing too. They were learning how to trust the Holy Spirit, and Peter healed a cripple. That leads us to today.

This summer's sermon series is called *Church Planting*. We are looking at the Book of Acts and today we are in the fourth chapter. This is the background. The news of Peter's healing of the cripple had reached the ears of the Jewish ruling council, the Sanhedrin. They were the same group that had Jesus executed. They were not pleased about Peter's healing and wanted to silence him. They arrest and interrogate Peter. May God give you ears to hear this morning's scripture, Acts 4:1-22. Let me call this message *Is There a Witness in the House?*

---

**Acts 4:1-22** <sup>1</sup> The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. <sup>2</sup> They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. <sup>3</sup> They seized Peter and John and, because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. <sup>4</sup> But many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand.

<sup>5</sup> The next day the rulers, the elders and the teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. <sup>6</sup> Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and others of the high priest's family. <sup>7</sup> They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or what name did you do this?"

<sup>8</sup> Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! <sup>9</sup> If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, <sup>10</sup> then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. <sup>11</sup> Jesus is:

“the stone you builders rejected,  
which has become the cornerstone.”

<sup>12</sup> Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”

<sup>13</sup> When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. <sup>14</sup> But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say. <sup>15</sup> So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together. <sup>16</sup> “What are we going to do with these men?” they asked. “Everyone living in Jerusalem knows they have performed a notable sign, and we cannot deny it. <sup>17</sup> But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn them to speak no longer to anyone in this name.”

<sup>18</sup> Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. <sup>19</sup> But Peter and John replied, “Which is right in God’s eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! <sup>20</sup> As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

<sup>21</sup> After further threats they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened. <sup>22</sup> For the man who was miraculously healed was over forty years old.

---

Warren Wiersbe once said, *“Let God be the judge. Your job is to be the witness.”* On Monday evening I was standing in the parking lot talking to a good friend. We talked about a variety of things, when she suddenly looked at me and said, “Russ, did I tell you my witness?” This is her story so I will try to do it justice.

She went to visit her mother. It was near the end of her mother’s life and she existed in a cloud of depression. She had been widowed for several years and everything was negative. Everything was wrong. Everything she said was critical. My friend expected to be greeted by a frown, but on this day, she was greeted by a smile. Relieved, she walked in and received an unusual question. Her mother asked, “Does God ever speak to you?” The daughter responded, “Mom, I talk to God all the time. I think he responds to me from time to time.” The dying woman said, “He speaks to me all the time. He is a fun guy and he tells me unusual things.” She continued, “I’m going to die.” The daughter said, “We are all going to die someday.” The mother said, “No, I am going to die in one week. Your father came to visit me and showed me what heaven is like. Heaven is a fun place! He told me I am going to die in one week.” Lost in her mother’s words, she just listened. The daughter looked at me and said, “Do you know how my witness ends?” I didn’t have a clue. She said, “My mother died exactly one week later.” She finished her story with a smile and these words, “I know my parents are together again, having fun in heaven!” How could I not tell that story? If that story reminds you of another divine story, say, **“Amen!”** With the word ‘witness’ in mind, let us look at this morning’s scripture lesson.

We are in the fourth chapter of Acts. I don't care how you turn the story. It is a story about witness. According to the text Peter had just healed a cripple. Listen to what I am about to say. No one is questioning the authenticity of the miracle. That doesn't happen today. We live in spiritually cynical times. For years, the man had sat there begging in the shadows of the temple. His existence depended on the generosity of others. He had no future and no opportunity to live a full life. Everyone had pity on him, but no one would have traded places with him. That is why they could not believe their eyes. This long-time beggar is whole, healed by Peter. Everyone is happy except two groups. First, the other beggars were not happy. They were asking, "Why not me?" Second, the leaders of the Orthodox faith were not happy. His healing signaled the continuation of their Jesus problem. They thought it would end at his execution. Not really knowing what to do, they had Peter and John arrested. In verse seven they asked, "*By what power or in what name did you done this?*" Peter answers the question in verses ten through twelve:

***"It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. Jesus is "the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone. Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."***

Does anything else have to be said? Those are impressive words for a common blue-collar man. If you study those words then you discover Peter answers their question by using scripture. He was saying to them, Jesus was the fulfillment of prophecy. He is telling us to never underestimate the value of our witness. He is simply telling them his experience with God. When was the last time you experienced God?

Today, I don't want to talk about Peter's witness. I want to talk about your witness. Each one of us has a witness that needs to be shared. Each one of us has an experience with God that needs to be shared. What is your witness? To encourage you to share your story, I want to look at two statements about witnessing. Both are extremely practical. Both are illustrated for us in the text. I will give you the statements up front and then I will unpack them for you in a few minutes. First, **witnessing is misunderstood**. In our time, witnessing is seen as negative. Has anyone ever shared their witness with you in a pushy, negative way? Never forget, in witnessing, you are not the judge. You are the witness. You simply tell what you have experienced. Second, **witnessing is important**. Your story reminds people that God is still active in our world. The only prerequisite for a powerful witness is a sincere heart. So if you are ready to begin, say, "**Amen!**" First, witnessing is misunderstood.

### **Witnessing is Misunderstood**

Can you relate to this story? Years ago, I was driving to school. I was running behind, so I decided to drive the back roads to save time. I would have made it to class on time, but I was stopped at a railroad crossing.

Frustrated, I sat there and watched the train inch along. I shut the car off and rolled the windows down because it was the hottest day of the year. As I studied the various cars on that train, something unusual happened. A young un-groomed man wearing a red flannel shirt suddenly appeared from the surrounding weeds and ran toward my car. I snapped to attention. I didn't have a chance to say a word when he looked at me and said, "Brother, you are going to hell if you haven't accepted Jesus!" He picked up my windshield wiper and placed a tract under it. As fast as he came, he was gone. As I sat there reading his literature, I could not question his theology. However, I do have a few questions about his method. Can anyone here relate to that story? Have you ever been assaulted by someone else's witness? I am convinced most of us haven't shared our witness because we don't want to be like the un-groomed, red flannel-shirted man. Witnessing is so misunderstood.

This week I "Googled" the question, why don't Christians share their witness? I didn't come up with one reason why people don't share their witness. I came up with nine reasons. Maybe you can relate to one of them? This is the list:

1. Ignorance – They don't know they are supposed to witness
2. Education - Older Christians are poor examples of witnessing
3. Wrong Assumptions - They assume everyone knows the Gospel
4. Apathy - No one is interested
5. Procrastination – I'll do it later
6. Worldliness – You don't want to look like a nut
7. Preoccupation – They don't think about sharing their story
8. Inadequacy – They have a lack of information
9. Rejection – No one wants to be rejected.

I think people don't share their witness because witnessing itself is misunderstood. What is witnessing? It is nothing more than sharing some experience with God. There is no good witness or bad witness. There is just your witness. You are not the prosecutor, defense attorney or judge. You are the witness. The only thing you are required to do is share what you have experienced. When was the last time you experienced God? When was the last time you shared that story? What is your witness? If that makes you think, say, "**Amen!**" Is there a witness in the house?

### **Witnessing is Important**

This is statement number two: your witness is important. I don't know how you can question that point. Just look at the scripture. Peter simply expressed his understanding of Jesus. According to Peter, Jesus was more than a wise teacher. Jesus was more than a positive role model. Jesus was more than a miracle worker. According to Peter, the events of Jesus' life were all part of the divine plan. The ultimate expression of his love was the cross. Without the cross, there is no hope of salvation. His understanding of the divine plan amazes me more than any miracle. Can I tell you the truth? I am intimidated by his witness. My simple witness can't compare.

Are you intimidated by his witness? That is fine, because this is the truth. The people in your life don't care about Peter's witness. The people in your life care about your witness. They care about your witness because they care about you. Your story reminds them that God is still active in our world. Your story, your witness, reminds people we are not alone. God is with us! Your story reminds people there is still hope. I challenge you today to share your story. I challenge you today to share your witness. And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**" Is there a witness in the house?

In Garrard County, Kentucky there is an old tradition among the Christian Churches. On every fifth Sunday of the month they gather for a hymn sing. That means they gather four times a year. That event is a big deal to those congregations. My seminary church, the Pleasant Grove Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), never missed a single one during my tenure. Each service was about the same. Besides the singing, there was the host pastor's opening welcome. Everyone was encouraged to stay for refreshments. There was a long list of prayer requests so everyone could get caught up on the news. There was an offering to support the local food bank and a powerful message about the importance of accepting Jesus as your Lord and Savior. After all, hell is hot! However, the best part of the service was when the host pastor stood up and asked the question, "Is there a witness in the house?" That was when the laity had the opportunity to grab the spotlight. One by one, people stood up and talked. Some told how they came to know Jesus. Some told how Jesus had supported them during some personal crisis. Some reported on some divine coincidence. It was a time for the spiritually mature to shine. Each one ended with the congregation shouting, "**Amen!**" So let me ask you the question.

Is there a witness in the house? In other words, what is your story? When was the last time you experienced God? Your story may be about the moment you accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. Your story may include some freak coincidence that reminded you that God was with you. Your story may include the words of a stranger, your angel, who gave you the strength to continue. Your story may include that overwhelming feeling that everything was going to be fine when everything was wrong. Everyone has a story. What is your story about God? What is your witness? I challenge you today to share your witness with someone and remind them that God is with us. Charles Stanley once said, "*His voice leads us not into timid discipleship but into bold witness.*" And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**" Is there a witness in the house?