

# Our Place at His Place

*I Witness*

September 6, 2020

**Welcome to where we're learning how to offer the reason for the hope we're receiving!**

So here we go: **are you up to the task?** The Apostle Paul said:

I consider my life worth *nothing* to me, if only I may finish the *race* and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me — **[And what's that task?]** the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace. - Acts 20:24 NIV



**It's not in a book so much as it's in you.** The Good News (i.e. Gospel) of God's grace (redemption and salvation by grace through faith in Jesus) has a unique effect on each individual life. **And all you're asked to do is to share you.** And *that* takes *no* effort. We *love* doing *that*. **And we can only fail by not being authentic and transparent.** And if your life centers on Christ, it's only natural. If it doesn't, we're *still* gonna witness (talk about ourselves) it'll just be tedious rather than enriching and inspiring. The *task* will be on the listeners of our self-centered testimony.



Once we **believe** in God, **receive** His Son, **join** His body, and **commit** our time, talents, and treasure to His Kingdom, **we must run the race as representatives** of the light of the life of Jesus Christ! Last Sunday we saw how we're called to be Ambassadors of Reconciliation; because ...



[God] reconciled *us* to himself through Christ and *gave* us the *ministry* of reconciliation: 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. - 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 NIV



That's *not* a suggestion. It's a directive straight from the mouth of our King. And **to ignore this commission is flat out disobedience.** The Lord wants to reunite with our friends, family, and acquaintances, and **He tells us to tell them.** But, this whole business of sharing our faith can intimidate and overwhelm even *outgoing* believers. **"All by myself?! On my own?!"** Yes!

**This is your mission,** because there are people only *you* can reach. **"Now I'm a missionary?!"** No. Calm down. Missionaries are sent to other countries and foreign places to establish the faith.

**Technically you're an evangelist.** Think of yourself as a **backyard missionary.** For us evangelists, **our mission field is anywhere our relationships are.** And *every* growing, grateful believer should desire to reunite our loving Father with His lost children. In fact, a follower of Christ who doesn't care to share His salvation, is either a **counterfeit**, or a **coward**, or at best, a **contradiction.**

But I'm not gonna try to psych you up and push you into pushing the Gospel onto your poor, unsuspecting friends and family. The opposite. **I want to set you at ease to share yourself**, like Jesus did: **naturally** and **joyfully** and **compellingly**. Because, believers panic because of their ignorance: "I don't know what to say, when to say it, or how to bring it up!" But, John said ...

*Anyone* who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart. - 1 John 5:10 NIV

**It's already in your heart!** So the things you're worried about *not* knowing how to share *aren't* what you're tasked with sharing right now. So relax. **You'll grow into your created purpose**. We tend to exaggerate what Jesus wants us to do. After His resurrection, behind locked doors ...

He said to [His disciples], "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: **[not that each of these will accompany everyone, but]** In my name they will drive out demons; **[as Paul did when he drove the spirit out of the fortune teller (Acts 16:18)]** they will speak in new tongues; **[as they did on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:4)]** they will pick up snakes with their hands; **[like they ... wait ... what?!]** and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; **[Beg pardon?!]** they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well." **[Yeah, yeah ... can we go back to the snakes and deadly poison?! Maybe we're under-exaggerating what Jesus wants us to do!]** – Mark 16:15-18 NIV

Now, there's *no* command to handle snakes or drink poison. In fact, we're told: **don't put God to a foolish test**. (Mat 4:7) *This* is a promise for those in God's witness protection program regarding the enemy. And I don't think poison means what we think it means. James writes:

The *tongue* ... is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. ... Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. ... [Can] a grapevine bear figs? **[Nope. Just grapes]** – James 3:8-12 NIV

Their *grapes* are filled with poison **[writes Moses, regarding the enemies of "our Rock" (Deut 32:31)]** ... the venom of serpents, the *deadly poison* of cobras. – Deut 32:31-33 NIV



**[David cries out]** Rescue me, O Lord, from evil men; protect me ... They make their tongues as sharp as a serpent's; the poison of vipers is on their lips. ... may they be thrown into the fire ... – Psalm 140:1-3, 10 NIV



And on and on the metaphor goes. The Apostle Paul, back when he was Saul the Pharisee/serpent and persecutor of Christians, *drank* that deadly poison (a.k.a. the Kool-Aid of Jesus' enemies). And yet, He received new life and ran the race with the task of testifying to the light of that life in the love of Christ. And remember when he was shipwrecked on Malta?

Paul gathered a pile of brushwood and, as he put it on the fire, a viper, driven out by the heat, fastened itself on his hand. When the islanders saw the snake hanging from his hand, **[Now that's snake handling!]** they said to each other, "This man must be a murderer; for though he escaped from the sea, justice has not allowed him to live." **[And there's your deadly poison!]** But Paul shook the snake off into the fire **[And that's**

**what David prayed!** ... The people expected him to swell up or suddenly fall dead, but after waiting a *long time* and seeing nothing unusual happen to him, they *changed* their *minds* and said he was a god. **[How that pendulum can swing!]** ... [The chief official's] father was sick in bed, suffering from fever and dysentery. Paul went in to see him and, after prayer, placed his hands on him and healed him. **["They will place their hands on sick," even after being bit by the snake!]** When this had happened, the rest of the sick on the island came and were cured. – Acts 28:3-9 NIV

How appropriate for God to work this miracle through Paul/Saul. So now, **what poisonous thing has attached itself to you?** And, are *you* going to succumb, or shake it off and demonstrate how the light of the love of Christ (that's *already* in your heart) can overcome whatever shade this world throws, or venom it spits at you? **'Cause, that's your witness.** And that's *how* and *when* others will see God in *you*. And, WOW that opinion pendulum can swing fast and far!



**Our best witness comes in our worst circumstances.** That's when courts are *convened* and we're literally given the *task* of testifying. I mean, **who calls for a witness with no trial?** And when Jesus says "you'll be My witnesses," He uses a very specific *judicial* term, because **witnesses don't argue cases or bring convictions.** Same goes for the Kingdom; *that's* the role of the Counselor and Judge Jesus.

**[Jesus told His disciples that]** The Counselor ... will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment – John 16:7-8 NIV

**[And Peter later said that]** [Jesus] went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil ... We are *witnesses* ... He was not seen by *all* the people, but by *witnesses* ... He *commanded* us to preach to the people *and* to *testify* that He is the one whom God appointed as *judge* of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about Him that everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." – Acts 10:39-43 NIV

A witness doesn't barge into a courtroom: **"Listen up, 'cause I'm the witness!"** No. When *does* a witness carry out their task? **When asked to share and to be questioned.** And what's a witness *expected* to share? **What they've seen, heard, and believe to be true.** And an out-of-order witness is immediately excused and disregarded. Whereas an orderly witness **waits patiently,** and **watches expectantly,** and then **speaks respectfully** when given the opportunity.



This is also known as being fishers of man. (Mt 4:19) It's the *ultimate* catch and release program: **catch 'em as they fall,** and then **release 'em from sin and shame and the fear of death.** And what do good fishermen spend the majority of their time doing? **Waiting patiently, watching expectantly, and speaking softly.** Know what I use to hear a lot while fishing when I was young? **"Don't make so much noise; it scares the fish."** Good advice. And the more we practice waiting and watching, the more sensitive we become to recognizing nibbles. So, **build relationships,** and **be yourself,** and **relax.**

You're just one witness. They'll call more if they need to. "But what if I can't answer their questions?" Not possible. Know why? Because "I don't know" is a great answer! Shows humility. Don't make it awkward. Help 'em find it. There's only one answer we better have.

*Always* be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect ... - 1 Peter 3:15 NIV

We're not told to prepare a dissertation on the theological implications of atonement and propitiation. We're told to be "prepared" to give "the reason/logos/word" for "the hope" we have. And **that's not a suggestion**. You *are* God's witness. And **sharing is critical to your created purpose**; you've been strategically placed in time and space to influence those around you.



So, what's "the hope that you have" in Christ? Forgiveness? Relationship? Purpose? Peace? Eternal life? Seeing Him face to face? You *better* know, or you might be functioning on religious autopilot. Last week I said **everyone longs to escape the darkness of sin**. And that's because without Christ, guilt is toxic, life is meaningless, peace of mind is out of reach, and death is disturbing if not terrifying. So, **what is the hope you have in your heart?** And more importantly, tell us what in the world you base it on. Hope-schmope; show us some *faith*! You see ...

Now *faith* is the substance of things *hoped* for, the evidence of things *not* seen. – Hebrews 11:1 NKJ

That's *why* you've been called as a witness. Who *are* you really? **What do you believe deep down in your heart?** ... **Why?** Because, everyone's lookin' for answers down here. And **it better not be a second-hand story**. *That's* not allowed. Tell us about *you*: what *you've* seen and heard and believe to be true. **Show us that you own your hopes**. 'Cause *that's* your faith. Jesus said:

You *will* receive *power* when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you *will be* my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. – Acts 1:7-8 NIV



Well, here we are! We would've been their inconceivable definition of the ends of the earth! So how's it feel to be stationed at the last outpost at the end of the earth? We need that power! But, **if a believer has no desire to help others find their way, have they received His Spirit?** He doesn't say "You'll receive power and you may or *may not be* My witnesses or *whatever*; I mean if you're like really *shy*."

**Shyness doesn't excuse us**. Witnesses aren't allowed to be too bashful or too timid to take the stand. **A witness who won't speak is in contempt**. Imagine telling a judge, "I'm gonna sit this one out. I'm just not wired that way." Imagine telling *the* Judge! Pray for boldness. Embrace the moment. Do what it takes. **You don't have a choice. Unless you're not a witness**. Are you? "I just need more courage." No you don't. I'm gonna be blunt. It's not bravery you need. Because ...

There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear – 1 John 4:18 NIV

If your children are in that burning house you'll try to save them. Boldness, shyness, and timidity have nothing to do with it. Your "love" for your children "drives out" and overwhelms your "fear" of personal peril or risk. Your clothes get burnt and torn off in the process and you're exposed in public – you don't *care!* Embarrassment doesn't *exist*. They're dying!

No, **we don't lack courage, we lack love**. We must be overwhelmed with passion for our Savior and compassion for His children. Imagine a fireman too *shy* to help you save your kids. One has nothing to do with the other. It's vital to understand this, because we pardon ourselves for being too shy, but *not* for being too unloving. We'd never say "*I'm just not wired to love.*" Not even when deceiving *ourselves*. So, **stop praying for courage and start praying to care**.



These sightseers are above a roaring waterfall when a little girl falls in. Everyone screams; but this guy or gal grabs a rope and dives in. The crowd is tense and silent as the hero swims directly toward the falls, and reaches the girl just in time! Everyone cheers. The hero yells, "Pull in the rope!" "*What rope? Were we supposed to ...*"

How do you want that story to end? Not everyone has the mindset, skill set, and wherewithal to jump right in. But, **it's just as vital to notice to grab the rope**. There are so many different approaches, different ways, different means, different situations. But, just *one* goal.

Everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins – Acts 10:43 NIV

Not everyone's the hero type. **But we can all do our part to pull together**. And when it comes to the task at hand, we have three options: **dive in**, or **hold the rope**, or **watch 'em die**. So, how *do* you want the story to end? Because, you *get* to decide.

**And all you're asked to do is to share you**. Authentically and transparently.

**And to prepare to share what you base your hopes on.**

**And to care enough to do your part when it's time to take the stand.**

So, are you up to the task?