

WITNESSING FOR CHRIST

John 1:12-51

I. The Witness of John the Baptist. John 1:19-34.

John the Baptist had been commissioned and sent by God to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah, and to bear his testimony for Him. Between the forerunner and the Christ there was a difference as great as that between the finite and the infinite, the temporal and the eternal, the reflected light of the moon and the original light of the sun. This pre-existent Christ had the preeminence over all human beings. Inasmuch as John the Baptist was six months old when Christ was born in Bethlehem, he occupied the center of the earthly stage before the Master did, but he hastened to assert that all that he had been doing was simply to prepare the way for the Messiah.

When John the Baptist was preaching in the wilderness of Judea, great crowds assembled to hear him. Some went so far as to suggest that perhaps he was the predicted Christ. The rulers could no longer disregard the power and influence of the popular preacher. A deputation was sent to interview him and ascertain whom He claimed to be. This deputation, which was composed of priests and Levites, who were emissaries of the Pharisees, asked him if he were the Messiah, Elijah, or the prophet who had been promised. He declared emphatically that he was neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet whom they were expecting, but that he was "the voice of one crying in the wilderness." He further told them that he did not consider himself worthy enough to untie the shoes of the coming Christ.

John the Baptist delighted to point his questioners and listeners to "the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world." For them he might have pointed out Christ as the great example, or as the great teacher of holiness and love, but, instead, he proclaimed Him as the One Who had come into the world to be the sacrifice for sin. Christ bore our sins, endured our punishment, suffered in our place, and provided salvation for us. Christ is the only One Who can lift up the sin from off the sinner and carry it away.

II. The Witness of the First Disciples. John 1:35-51.

Andrew and John went into the wilderness to hear John the Baptist preach, and they became his disciples. On the second day after the baptism of Christ, John the Baptist, Andrew, and John were talking when Christ approached. John the Baptist fastened his gaze upon Christ and said to his followers, Andrew and John, "Behold the Lamb of God!" Thereafter, they left him to follow Christ.

When Andrew attached himself to Christ, and experienced for himself the joy and blessedness of personal fellowship with Him, he did not sit down in complacency, but he immediately became concerned that his brother, Simon Peter, enter into a similar experience and relationship. Andrew simply could not remain silent and withhold the glorious news that the Lord had saved him and had filled his soul with joyous thanksgiving. He just had to tell someone what had happened to him.

Just as soon as he found Christ to be the answer to his spiritual needs, desires, and hopes, Andrew went straight home to find his brother and with him to get in his first work for the Saviour. He was not afraid to speak to his brother about Christ, and to recommend the Saviour to him. Andrew had received a peace, a satisfaction, and a joy from Christ which meant everything to him. So, he could not rest until he let his brother know about this peace, satisfaction, and joy, and have the privilege of becoming a partaker of them. Andrew went to his brother, and enthusiastically told him what he knew about Christ. He did not preach to Simon Peter, nor did he enter into an argument with him, but he simply told him what the Saviour had done for him.

His remarks were characterized by conviction and assurance. Andrew related his Christian experience to Simon Peter, invited him to come to Christ, and introduced him to the Lord Jesus. As a result of the testimony of his brother, Simon Peter got to know the Saviour in the forgiveness of his sins. The Bible describes it in these words: "And he brought him to Jesus." How simple! And yet how wonderful! A man gave his personal testimony in the presence of his brother, and recommended his Saviour to him, and he was saved as a result.

Andrew set us a worthy example. He refused to withhold from another the glorious news that Christ had saved him and filled his soul with joyous thanksgiving. He just had to tell someone what the Lord had done for him. Doubtless, witnessing to his brother was more difficult than if he had been telling somebody else about the Saviour, but he did it in a sweet spirit and an effective manner. Humble man that he was, Andrew kept himself in the background, and never sought to focus attention upon himself. Instead, he talked earnestly about his wonderful Saviour and what He had done for him. The most significant thing about Andrew was that every time he was mentioned in the Bible he was introducing somebody to Christ. In every glimpse we have of him he was in the act of leading someone to the Saviour.

How like Christ it is to talk with others about the salvation of the soul! How unlike Christ it is for any professing Christian to live without doing so! The supreme task of every Christian is to introduce somebody to the Saviour. Have you ever brought a soul to Christ? If not, and you are saved, you ought to be ashamed of yourself. If you do not introduce somebody to Christ, there will be a missing note in your song, a missing joy in your experience, and a star missing from your crown. Introducing a person to Christ is the greatest service you can ever render for Him. How many have you really tried to introduce to Christ? Remember, you are not responsible for the results, but you will have to give an account for your testimony.

After Andrew had introduced his brother to Christ, the Lord gazed at Simon Peter intently and discerningly. He then diagnosed his case with unerring accuracy. He observed that Simon Peter was uncouth and crude. He saw in him an impulse that was strong, an energy that was immense, and a determination that was selfish. Christ knew that Peter's main trait was impulsiveness, that he acted according to his feelings rather than on the basis of reason, and that he often moved first and then thought it over later. He knew that Peter was very unstable, and yet Christ saw in this selfish, weak, cowardly, and impetuous man the possibility of a transformed and useful personality. With unerring accuracy Christ spoke the prophecy: "Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone." Our Lord was emphasizing the fact that, if Peter would yield himself to Him, He would make him into the kind of man he ought to be. Christ sees us not only as we are, but also as we can be. He sees the hidden hero in every man, if the man will only yield his life to Him and let Him make it what He wants it to be and what it ought to be.

The following day Christ started back to Nazareth. On His way He met Philip, and to him He uttered the terse and constraining personal invitation, "Follow me." His invitation was accepted and His command was obeyed, and Philip became a disciple of Christ. Our Lord was highly pleased to have the services of this unobtrusive and thoughtful man, whom He knew would not be unduly elated by success, nor easily daunted by failure. Thoroughly convinced that Christ was the Messiah, Philip immediately left all and embarked on life's greatest adventure, which is that of following Christ.

Like Andrew, Philip could not keep to himself the good news of his salvation. He wanted his friend to know his Saviour, too, so he went and sought out Nathaniel, and told him that he had found the Messiah in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. These two concepts -- Messiah and Nazareth -- seemed to Nathaniel to be utterly self-contradictory. His preconceived notions would not allow him to believe what Philip had said, so he asked incredulously, "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?"

Knowing that Nathaniel was so highly prejudiced against Nazareth that he could not even imagine anything good coming from such an unpromising environment, and knowing full well that he could not argue him into the family of God, Philip merely insisted that he come and see for himself what manner of man this Jesus of Nazareth was. Not many people, if any, have ever been argued into Christianity.

When Christ saw Nathaniel approaching, He pointed out one of the salient features in his character. After reading Nathaniel's inmost heart, in which there was not any trickery or duplicity, our Lord gave him the singularly high testimony that in him was no guile. Christ also saw in Nathaniel qualities which the world did not realize that he possessed. He recognized that he was a man of conviction, intelligence, sincerity, and depth. Nathaniel reflected the glory of his Master and commended His glorious gospel to others by his lips and by his life. Likewise, Christ sees the potential in you, the person you can become under His guidance and by His power, and the person that He can bring out in you.