

THE FRANTIC FUTURE AND THE CHRISTIAN DIRECTIVE

ACTS 1:8

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We are living today on the threshold of the frantic future.

As described by the business man, it will be characterized by managerial scarcity, computer forgery, delphic technology, mobile money, scientific gypsies, and taxation unlimited.

As described by the sociologist, it will be characterized by population immensity, insufficient productivity, ravaging hunger, city obsolescence, evaporating freedoms, outworn skills, and unavailing knowledge.

As described by the moralist, it will be characterized by individual authority, increasing humanism, sweeping relativity, growing lawlessness, mounting sensualism, spreading violence, and human degeneration.

As described by the Lord Jesus, it will be characterized by "distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring, men's hearts failing them for fear and for looking after those things that are coming upon the earth" (Luke 21:25, 26).

As we face this frantic future, the time-honored directive of the Lord Jesus comes to us with the same freshness and the same force as it did more than 1900 years ago. I refer to the words of Christ in the passage, "Ye shall be witnesses unto Me."

Inasmuch as this school started out with the purpose of knowing Christ and making Him known as the only Savior and Lord of Life, it behooves us to refocus our sights on the divine directive that comes to each one of us, and that has never been recalled or altered in all these years. Though the material of our employment is academic, our purpose must ever be to make a contribution to needy humanity for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Briefly consider with me the nature of this responsibility the Lord Jesus laid upon us, "And ye shall be witnesses unto me." This involves four things:

- The People upon whom He laid this responsibility.
- The Performance essential to this responsibility.
- The Process by which to discharge this responsibility.
- The Purpose for which He gave this responsibility.

THE PEOPLE UPON WHOM HE LAID THIS RESPONSIBILITY

"And ye. . ."

The immediate designation of the pronoun is the apostles. This can be seen by examining verse 2. This group constitutes those who were first called by the Lord to follow Him. They are the group to whom He devoted Himself for three and one-half years as to no other. They are the group to whom He unfolded the mysteries of the faith. They are the group to whom He manifested Himself alive after His resurrection by many infallible proofs. It is quite obvious that this group does not exhaust the breadth of this intention; they merely become representative of a larger group.

The increased application is seen by examining verse 15. The group has now increased to 120, and they are referred to as disciples. It is this number that formed the group upon whom the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost, and they were baptized into that body called the Church. This is the larger fulfillment of the very verse with which we are now dealing. To those upon whom the Holy Spirit came there was communicated power and this power qualified them for the responsibility to which the Lord refers.

The inclusive significance of this statement is not reached until later. Writing to the Corinthian believers as a point of departure, Paul made it clear that he was addressing all believers across the Christian era (I Cor. 1:2). He said of them, "For by one spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit" (I Cor. 12:13). This can mean only one thing, namely, that this command reaches down across the years to everyone of us who have in truth named the name of Christ.

The inescapable involvement of every genuine believer in this command is the clear meaning of the verse. There can be no rationalizing away of responsibility by suggesting that this command was delivered to the apostles, or at the most to the believers of that day, and therefore it is not incumbent upon believers of the present hour. There is no way to lay this upon preachers or missionaries in differentiation from laymen of our day. Such reasoning is pagan, illogical, and unscriptural. It could be evidence that the one who uses it has never advanced beyond the stage of mere profession to actual possession of life in Christ Jesus.

THE PERFORMANCE ESSENTIAL TO THIS RESPONSIBILITY

"Witnesses"

The element of expression confronts the reader at the very outset. A witness is one who tells what he has seen and heard (Acts 1:22; 10:39). The original Greek word at this point gives to us the English word "martyr." Most people think of a martyr as one who dies. But the facts are these, that dying does not make one a martyr. Often men have had to pay with their life for doing this, but it was their testimony that made them a martyr. Explaining their situation before the Sanhedrin, Peter and John declared, "For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). And Peter had just declared that it was Christ who had healed the lame man, this Christ whom they had rejected and in whom alone there was salvation.

The essential of experience, however, is basic to any verbal expression. Apart from the experience of seeing and hearing, testimony is appreciably reduced in value. Therefore, the world in general recognizes that the person with experience gives the most credible testimony. The Sanhedrin recognized this and sought to close the mouths of Peter and John with threats (Acts 4:16, 17). The early believers recognized this, so they prayed God that they might have boldness to speak (Acts 4:29). Their experience qualified them to be first class witnesses. The Holy Spirit had come upon them, and it was the experience of the Holy Spirit that provided the necessary power to make a credible witness. This is the kind of power that produces results.

The effect of exemplification in word and work comprises the full responsibility of a witness. Genuine experience of the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit must inevitably demonstrate itself in expression of word and the ethics of walk. These two go together. The expression by word of mouth explains the source of salvation. The example of life and walk certifies the genuineness of the testimony. Announcement by word of mouth gives forth the meaning, while adornment by deeds of life makes the meaning attractive. It was the joining of these two that finally caused people of the world to call believers Christians (Acts 11:26). From believers they were constantly hearing a testimony concerning Christ, and they were constantly seeing in them the example of Christ. So they christened them Christians, or little Christs.

Any explanation for exemption from bearing testimony for Christ by word of mouth is fallacious. We should never underestimate the value of adorning the doctrine of Christ with purity of life. But living the Christian life does not remove the responsibility of giving verbal testimony to Christ. It is this verbal testimony to Christ that is the power of God unto salvation. It is this message about Christ that conveys the meaning of Christ to the minds of men and which the Holy Spirit uses to bring men to Christ. Living the life of purity and holiness makes the message attractive, but it can never convey that message. The message can be perfect. The life will never be perfect until we get to glory. Therefore, mere dependence upon life is apt to convey a slightly false message, if any, and this could mean that a soul could be denied the opportunity to come to Christ.

THE PROCESS BY WHICH TO DISCHARGE THIS RESPONSIBILITY "Shall be"

The fullness and the force of this verb is not fully apprehended, even by many readings of the text. It requires some careful and deliberate concentration to discover the sense and the significance of these words as they apply to the believer. There are at least three things that need to be called to our attention.

The present reality in the life of a true believer is marked by the root meaning of this verb. This is a verb of state. For anyone who has actually experienced the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit, this means that he is in actuality, as a present reality, a witness. He has experienced the life of God. He is indwelt by the Spirit of God. And thus being indwelt by Christ, he is a child of God. This is a fact to be believed. It is upon the basis of this fact that he is qualified to make a testimony for Christ. Who is more qualified to speak of the favor

of God, the blessing of God, the benefits that come in salvation than the one who has actually experienced the presence of God in his own life? In the very nature of the case he is a witness. Until the believer grasps this fact, he will never have the courage of conviction to express this to others.

The progressive realization of this fact is set forth in the tense of the verb. The form in English is clearly future, and renders accurately the original Greek form. In addition, it is in the middle voice. This makes the future form progressive in meaning. This means that while the basic qualification for witnessing has been experienced, the fulness of its manifestation involves a progressive unfolding. It is another way of saying that there must be a continuous growth in grace, an enlarging experience with the Lord, a maturing of the life in relation to Christ. Peter could testify to this in his own life. He was a witness at the outset of his ministry, but thirty years had made a difference. Thirty years later he was a greater witness because he had grown in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (I Pet. 3:18). At the outset of his ministry he even dared to deny the Lord Jesus. But at the conclusion of his pilgrimage he suffered crucifixion upside down without flinching. It is possible to trace the growing effectiveness of his witness through life.

Finally, personal responsibility is incorporated into this verb. Being a middle voice, it lays emphasis upon the subject exercising personal exertion to achieve the full force of his qualifications for witnessing. Even though one possesses new life, the fulness of that life can never be realized across the years without the exercise of personal responsibility. One can never achieve what God intends without putting forth effort to reach that goal. Since one is qualified for witnessing by having experienced salvation, then let him bear his testimony. If one wants to achieve efficiency in testimony, then let him keep on at the task of witnessing, using every opportunity, profiting by every mistake, seeking new and more skilful methods, and ever drawing nearer to Him whose grace and knowledge will attract and capture the hearts of men. I am convinced that this means that no believer has any right to complain that he cannot witness. This is not a question of ability; it is a question of desire and determination.

THE PURPOSE FOR WHICH HE GAVE THIS RESPONSIBILITY

"Unto me" or "My"

Whether we accept the reading of the King James Version, "unto me," meaning that something is to be done to or for Christ, or the reading of the American Standard Version, "my," which is supposed to represent a better text, and means belonging to Christ, there are three things that emerge from this fact where I want to lay particular emphasis.

The first has to do with the presentation of a person. A witness to a person, or a witness belonging to a person, finally resolves itself into representation of that person. It is right here that Christianity differentiates itself from all human philosophy and pagan religion. Thinking on the purely human level has never been able to rise above the natural. It has never been able to explain the existence of creation apart from itself. Therefore, some sort of pantheistic religion developed. Its gods were always a mere part of creation, and never took on the proportions of the supernatural, the infinite, or the holy. Inevitably these gods partook

of the nature of the impersonal, the finite, and the impure. It is right at this point that Christianity takes on striking contrast. Believers bear witness to a person, that person is God : flesh and that person represents the triune God. It was for testimony like this that Christ incurred the wrath of Jewry that led to crucifixion. It was testimony like that that led to the persecution of believers from earliest times. But it is testimony like this that answers the need of aching hearts and has been used of God to bring men to a saving knowledge of Christ.

The second has to do with the proclamation of a person. At this point I want you to consider the message that believers are called upon to proclaim. We call it the gospel. In fullest form that is the message of the Bible. At its heart it is that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures (I Cor. 15:3-4). As thus stated, this message is something that can be heralded by any believer regardless of his mental development. But examined more closely there is contained in it a whole world philosophy. It is the greatest philosophy ever propounded, and the only philosophy that explains the facts of life and offers an adequate solution to the problems of life. Essentially, this philosophy is the philosophy of a person. That person is both God and man. That person as God is creator of the universe. That person had to enter His creation as a man to rescue it from sin. That person performed a feat at Calvary and the tomb that only God could perform. That feat thus performed was occasioned by persons marred by sin but worth saving. This lifts humanity from the depths of mere impersonal things to which the pagan philosophies of mankind have relegated him. This is what we proclaim when we bear witness to Christ.

The third has to do with the personification of a person. I have insisted that a witness is one who bears testimony of his experience, but it needs to be emphasized again and again that our experience is more than mere external experience. Knowing Christ is more than possessing descriptive knowledge of Him. It also includes experiential knowledge, and apart from this it can never be said that we are Christians. Paul declares that ". . . great is the mystery of Godliness: God was manifest in the flesh. . ." (I Tim. 3:16). The eternal God was in Christ making clear to man the truth of God. But this was only the beginning and the center for a new departure. There came a time when Christ took up His residence in men, so that it could be affirmed, "Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2:20). This is wrought by the Holy Spirit and affirmed in the opening part of Acts 1:8. It is this that qualifies believers for fullness of testimony. A person has taken up His residence in the believer. That person is God. The living of that person through believers brings God into full view of men. This is the only way men can be confronted with God. This means that the living of the Christian life becomes one of the most important things in the activity of a believer. Joined with the message of the Gospel, there is complete testimony for Christ.

Noting the direction in which the world is moving today, this command of the Lord becomes more pertinent than ever. By the gradual paganizing of professing Christianity, the world is moving swiftly toward that ghastly inferno of Nazi Germany, when human beings were treated like so much impersonal matter and converted into fat, and hair, and chemical substance for the promotion of the dehumanizing, atheizing, impersonalizing, desensitizing holocaust. This is the direction in which the world is moving today, and there is only one ministry calculated to rescue men from this jet-speed descent to final doom. That ministry and message is the one

his school claims for its own. Sheer dereliction of duty would be reckoned up to us in this time of national, and international, and global crisis, if we do not rally to that which is basic and fundamental to the existence of this school: To know Christ and make Him known as the only Savior and Lord of Life.

We are living, we are dwelling,
In a grand and awful time;
In an age on ages telling,
To be living is sublime.

We are living when the nations
Thunder through the years;
When the judgment clouds are gath'ring,
When men face the vale of tears.

We are living when the endtime
Casts its shadow over life;
When the mighty trains of history
March toward the final strife.

We are living in the morning
When the dawn of endless day
Will burst in glory through the clouds
And the night will pass away.

We are living midst the heart cries
In this dark and dreadful night;
Ours the message for the crisis,
Ours to rescue from this plight.