

LESSON 199

THE CHURCH WITNESSING

Related Scripture: Acts 8:25-40

KEY VERSE: "Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ."—Acts 20:21.

Lesson Scripture: Mark 5:18-20;
Acts 8:3-8; 18:24-28

Introduction:

"Let the redeemed of the Lord say so" (Ps. 107:2) is an ancient command which still holds good. Every child of God, even those who are not church members, ought to bear witness to God's saving grace. But the New Testament church is the one institution on earth commissioned by our Lord to bear a continuing and faithful testimony to the end of the age (Mat. 28:18-20), and the "Christian" who despises or neglects this divinely appointed agency is certainly not as good a witness as the one who honors his Lord in scriptural baptism and church membership.

Our present lesson gives examples of witnessing. The following outline may be helpful:

1. Witness of Works, Mark 5:18-20
 - a. Personal affection, 18
 - b. Personal assignment, 19
 - c. Personal action, 20
2. Witness of Wonders, Acts 8:3-8
 - a. Persecution and preaching, 3-5
 - b. Meaning of miracles, 6-8
3. Witness of Word, Acts 18:24-28
 - a. Biblical eloquence, 24
 - b. Biblical enterprise, 25
 - c. Biblical exposition, 26
 - d. Biblical exhortation, 27
 - e. Biblical evangelism, 28

Notes on the Printed Text:

Witness of Works, Mark 5:18-20.

Demon possession is not to be confused with ordinary physical or mental diseases. Demons or "devils" are evil spirits having a very real though invisible personal existence. In this case the demon who had possessed the man called himself "Legion: for we are many." (V. 9.) A Roman legion numbered about 6,000 men. When this legion of unclean spirits left the man at Jesus' command, they had permission to enter a herd of hogs, with the result that 2,000 hogs committed suicide (vv. 11-13). Surely this man had an experience to talk about.

Your experience and mine may not have been so exciting, but if we have had a real experience with the Lord, we ought to be willing to tell others about His works in and through and for us.

Personal Affection, 18.

Delivered from demonic possession, the man loved the Christ Who had delivered him, and wished to stay with Him. How much do you love Jesus, if He is your Savior, and how much do you desire to be with Him?

Personal Assignment, 19.

Because he loved his Savior, this man was qualified to give a good testimony to his friends. Some people who think they are Christians would probably do well to keep quiet about it. Witnesses ought to be respectable and credible. If we have had a personal experience with the Lord, then we have a personal duty, a personal assignment to witness for Him.

Personal Action, 20.

This man did what Jesus told him to do. He had a marvelous story to tell, and all who heard it marveled. The fact is that every sinner saved by grace has a marvelous story to tell, and we ought to tell it, whether men marvel at it or not.

Witness of Wonders, Acts 8:3-8.

Ordinary operations of divine providence suffice for ordinary times. But the God Who created all things and upholds all things by the word of His power (He. 1:2, 3) can work signs, miracles, and wonders when He will.

Persecution and Preaching, 3-5.

Of the persecution of God's ancient people Israel in Egypt it is written, "The more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew." (Ex. 1:12.) So with New Testament believers: persecution did not choke out the gospel; Saul could "make havoc" of the church, but the scattered members "went everywhere preaching the word." Among them was "Philip the evangelist" (Acts 21:8), who dared to preach Christ to the Samaritans. The fact is, sad to say, the church at Jerusalem seems to have failed to obey the command of Christ to witness "in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8) until driven to it by persecution.

Meaning of Miracles, 6-8.

Here again we may note that miracles served to get a hearing for the word of God, "those things which Philip spake." God can work miracles; but also He can permit evil powers to work miracles. False prophets may do "many wonderful works." (Mat. 7:15-23.) The test of truth is not whether its spokesman can work a miracle, but whether it is in accord with the word of God.

Witness of Word, Acts 18:24-28.

After all has been said and done, the fact remains that God's children have been born again from incorruptible seed "through the word of God." (I Pe. 1:23.) See also Jas. 1:18; II Pe. 1:4; Ro. 1:16; I Cor. 15:1-11.

Biblical Eloquence, 24.

Among the blind, says an old saw, the one-eyed man is king. It is remarkable that an eloquent man with only a partial knowledge of truth could be called "mighty in the scriptures." But there is so much to learn from the Bible, and so much popular ignorance about it, that eloquent men with little Biblical knowledge still get great reputations and followings as religious leaders.

Biblical Enterprise, 25.

Surely it is commendable to be fervent in spirit, and Apollos was doing well as far as he knew. And what he knew was good as far as it went. But it seems that his knowledge of John's baptism was from the early days of John's ministry, so that he did not know that John had identified Jesus as the Christ, the One greater than John Who was to come after him.

Biblical Exposition, 26.

Eloquence is one thing; spiritual understanding is another. No doubt Apollos was a gifted speaker, but Aquila and Priscilla had a better knowledge of God and His word. Thank God, they had the courage and tact to undertake the instruction of a man more able than themselves. Thank God also that Apollos was humble enough to remain teachable, unlike some modern religious leaders who have the gift of gab and little else.

Biblical Exhortation, 27.

Here is an early example of a church letter of recommendation, unless we are to suppose a multitude of individual letters from individuals to individuals—a very improbable supposition. It is certainly Biblical for both individual believers and true churches of the Lord Jesus to exhort and encourage one another in the faith and service of Christ.

Biblical Evangelism, 28.

With New Testament church connection and endorsement, Apollos became a more effective instrument of evangelism, showing through the scriptures (correctly translating) "that the Christ was Jesus." He had previously known the Christ of Old Testament prophecy and of John's early preaching and baptism; but now he knew that the Christ preached by John, the Christ with reference to Whom John baptized, was none other than Jesus.

Key Verse:

**"Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ."
—Acts 20:21.**

So the apostle Paul summed up his witnessing as an official missionary from the church at Antioch. (Acts 13:1-3.) Churches today need to stay with this New Testament message.