

May 12, 2024 – 1 John 5:9-15

What's the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word "testimony?" If you're anything like me, the image that I have is of a courtroom. A place where sworn testimony is given. Where people recount what they have heard and seen. Where people serve as witnesses.

I want you to keep that image in your mind today. Because we hear a lot about "testimony" in our Epistle lesson. The word is used six times in just three verses. And just as in modern English, in ancient Greek, "testimony" is a legal term. Testimony is what a witness gives in a courtroom.

In fact, they're actually the same word. To give testimony and to be a witness are the exact same term in Greek. But you might be surprised by what that word is. Because the word for both testimony and witness in Greek is *martyria*. A martyr is someone who gives testimony. A martyr is someone who is a witness.

Now, of course, we don't use the word "martyr" quite that way in English. In English, a martyr is someone who dies because they gave testimony. Someone who dies because they were a witness. But that's the original meaning of the word. And that gives us some important context as we examine our Epistle reading today. Because in this passage, St John helps us understand what it truly means to give a testimony. Both from God's perspective and from ours.

First, from God's perspective, the Father has given us his testimony in his Son. We read in verse 9, "*If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater.*" I mentioned before about what you thought of when you heard the word "testimony." Some of you probably thought about the courtroom. But some of you may have also thought about something else: giving a testimony of your faith.

Which, for Christians, has become a very common way to use the word. But that's not what John is talking about here. At least, not yet. He starts by talking about the testimony that God gives. Yes, God gives his testimony. Before we ever give our testimony to another human being, God gives his testimony to us.

And what is that testimony of God? Well, for that, we need to circle back to last week's reading. Because this talk of giving testimonies actually started in verse 8. Unfortunately, our lectionary split this reading at an awkward point.

But if we go back to verse 8, we see that the testimony of God is that of the Spirit, the water, and the blood. Now what are these referring to. Well, these three words are referring to three key moments in Jesus' life that testify to his divinity. The water of his baptism, at which the the voice of the Father called out from heaven and the Holy Spirit came down like a dove. The blood of his crucifixion, where he forgave the sins of humanity and defeat sin, death, and the devil on our behalf. And the Spirit, whom he promised to his disciples, and who was poured out on them on Pentecost.

The water, the Spirit, and the blood – Jesus' entire life, death, resurrection, ascension, and giving of the Holy Spirit – are testimony by God the Father that Jesus is the Christ, the Savior, God made flesh, who takes away our sins. Before we ever give any testimony – before we even have faith in Christ at all – God gives his testimony to us. Testimony that Jesus is the one whom we should be trust and believe.

He didn't need to. God owed nothing to us. In our arrogance, we like to pretend like we have authority over God. That we can call him to the witness stand and grill him for testimony until the truth comes out. We can't. We're the ones who believed the serpent's lie. We're the ones who constantly reject the truth that's already been written on our hearts. So God could have ignored us, abandoned us, and left us completely in the dark.

But in his love for us, he chose to testify anyway. He chose to give us the Truth of his Son. Even when so many in this sinful world would rather hear a lie.

And in the process, he gave us something of incredible value. He gave us objective truth. Truth that isn't based on opinions or subjective emotions or relative values. The life of Jesus Christ is an objective truth set forth by the Father himself. We can't change the reality of Christ's work on the cross and his resurrection from the dead anymore than we can stop the sun from shining. This is God's witness, not yours. This is God's testimony, not the testimony of men.

So when it comes to things like sharing our faith, that's kind of a misnomer. It's not really our faith. It's not really our testimony. We are simply telling the story of what Jesus Christ has done for sinners like you and me. It's God's testimony, not ours. And we're kidding ourselves if we think we can do any better than what God has given us in his Word.

But this testimony isn't just for others. It's for us. And it gives us life. John says in verse 11, *"And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life."*

Our world is full of people trying to sell us life. Diets, exercise plans, twelve-step programs, supplements, medicines, surgeries. Testimonies of men that claim they can deliver life. Now, that's not to say they aren't sometimes helpful. But, ultimately, every person who puts their trust in these things of the world will still eventually die. So how much life can they really give?

Only Jesus gives life, because only Jesus gives resurrection from the dead. Life today is nice. But it's also temporary. Life on the last day is far more important. Because that life is eternal.

That alone would be reason enough to put our faith in him. I mean, who wouldn't sacrifice something finite to gain something infinite? Something perishable to gain something imperishable. But on top of that, there are immediate blessings to the eternal life that Christ gives us.

Life in Christ means you have true peace, true hope, and true love even here and now. Life in Christ means you have the hope of heaven, even in the midst of a medical, financial, or natural disaster. Life in Christ means you have forgiveness for all your sins and freedom from your past.

Because you have the testimony of God, you have life, and life in abundance. Because you have the testimony of God, you have grace upon grace. Because you have the testimony of God, nothing can separate you from his love.

Which means that, yes, we do have a great testimony to give to others. In verse 10 of our text, we have kind of an odd phrase: *"Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself."* What does it mean to have this testimony about Christ in yourself?

Well, what it means is that as you get ahold of God's testimony that is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, it starts to get ahold of you. The Word you hear preached in a Sunday sermon, read in personal devotions, and taught to you in Bible study changes you for the better. And whether you know whole chapters of the Bible or just know that Jesus died for sinners and rose again, you can testify to God's great deeds knowing it's not the testimony of men but the testimony of God.

You don't just believe IN Jesus. You believe Jesus. You believe that what he says to you is true. And because you believe Jesus, you never go alone. Every day, Jesus is joining you as your constant companion on the way. Every day, he is sending his Spirit to guide you into all truth. And to help you guide other into that truth too.

So never, ever be afraid to testify to the God who created you, redeemed you, and calls you by name. Because it's not your testimony. But because it's his testimony. Given to you, that you may share it with others. That you may be that *martyria*, that witness, testifying to the truth. That all may know the truth of Jesus Christ, who died and rose again for you. Amen.