

2 Cor 11:24-28

We are answering the second question that we asked of Acts 1:8 today. What? Witnesses.

I want to remind you, that the greek word translated witness in Acts 1:8, and throughout the new testament is the word “martyres.”

1. The word literally, and originally meant witness, an eye witness or ear witness.
2. The word however, as you can probably tell, has been borrowed by the English Language “martyr” and means to die for one’s faith.
3. This was because the witnesses “martyres” of the NT so often were put to death for their witness that the word martyres became synonymous with one who dies for their faith.

With that said, 2 Corinthians 11 can give us serious insights into what it means to be a witness...martyres. Let us look at the “witness” of the Apostle Paul.

I. Scourged for the Gospel v24

A. This was the Jewish form of punishment

1. He was stripped and tied to some kind of stake so that he could not run or fall.
2. Then a person trained in flogging would take a whip and lash Paul's back 39 times.
3. The law allowed forty stripes; but they, pretending to be lenient, and to act within the letter of the law, inflicted but thirty-nine.
4. He who scourges lays one third on the criminal's breast, another third on his right shoulder, and another on his left.
5. Halfway through the skin would begin to break and tear. By the end, parts of Paul's back would be like jelly.
6. The lacerations would not be clean, but torn and shredded, so that healing would be slow and complicated by infection.
7. Now, consider that this happened a second time on the same back, opening all the scars. It healed more slowly the second time.
8. Then consider that some months later it happened a third time.
9. Then it happened again. And finally it happened a fifth time.

B. And this was just one of Paul's suffering.

II. Struck for the Gospel v25a

A. This was under the Roman government, as they beat criminals in this way.

1. There was generally no limit to the number of times the victim would be struck
2. The severity of the beating depended upon the mood of the soldier giving the beating
3. Acts 16:22-23 *Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods. And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely.*

B. This happened 3 times

III. Stoned for the Gospel v25b

- A. This was the usual mode of punishment among the Jews for blasphemy.
 - 1. Generally when one was stoned, he was stoned to death.
 - 2. They did stone Paul until they thought he was dead and then just dumped him outside of the city.
 - 3. Acts 14:19 *Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead.*
- B. He was stoned for the Gospel

IV. Shipwrecked for the Gospel v25c

- A. Paul made many voyages and shipwrecks often occurred in those seas.
- B. He hadn't yet experienced the shipwreck of Acts 27:39-44 so we know that he suffered in this manner at least four times in his life.

V. Suffered for the Gospel v26-28

- A. In perils of waters—in crossing rivers
- B. Robbers—no doubt the apostle was often attacked, but was poor and had nothing to lose
- C. Fellow Jews—How hard was it for a man with an education like Paul to bear such, and to wander about like a vagabond, hungry and almost naked, yet coming into the presence of persons of high life,
- D. Loss of sleep—from abundant toils and from danger
- E. He was constantly suffering from ill health
- F. In addition to these external trials, he had mental trials and anxieties resulting from the necessary care of all the churches.

2 Cor 4:7-12

I want us to see 3 major applications from this text that will help us understand what it means to be a witness.

1. **Christianity is defined far differently by us today than it was by Paul**

- A. We have treated Christ as Savior, and ignored the fact that He is Lord.
 - 1. We have a tendency to define our theology by our actions and feelings
 - 2. We should define our actions and feelings by our theology!
 - 3. Just say, what does the Bible say and do it!
 - 4. *The second century Christian leader Tertullian was once approached by a man who said, "I have come to Christ, but I don't know what to do. I have a job that I don't think is consistent with what Scripture teaches. What can I do? I must live. To that Tertullian replied, Must you?"*
 - 5. *In the Vietnamese Highlands, and American volunteer commented on the suffering of the Vietnamese Christians. One of the Vietnamese Christians said, "Suffering is not the worst thing that can happen to us. Disobedience to God is!"*

B. Our definition of Christianity is far different than Paul's.

1. 1 Cor 15:32 *If the dead do not rise, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!"*
2. *Without the hope of resurrection, one should pursue ordinary pleasures and avoid extraordinary suffering.*
3. Sadly, this is what most western "Christians" do today
 - a. We pursue ordinary pleasures
 - b. We avoid extraordinary suffering
 - c. And call it the blessed Christian life
 - d. John Piper, "*Most Christians in the prosperous West describe the benefits of Christianity in terms that would make it a good life, even if there were no God and no resurrection.*"

C. 1 Cor 15:19 *If in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.*

1. How many Christians do we know who could say, The lifestyle I have chosen as a Christian would be utterly foolish and pitiable if there is no resurrection?
2. Phil 3:7-11 *But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.*
3. What we call Christianity is not what Paul called Christianity!

2. Our failure to suffer has hindered evangelism

A. God intends for the afflictions of Christ to be presented to the world through the afflictions of His people.

1. Churches and Christians today are so prone to say, come and see.
 - a. If they come they don't see people sold out to Christ!
 - b. They see CEO style leaders, conversational "preaching", people who are ready to jump on the next bandwagon in hopes of quick fix
 - c. What they want to see is people so legitimate, so convinced, and so on fire for Christ that they are willing to up their \$\$, give up their possessions, give up their families, and their LIVES FOR HIM!
2. That is not what they see!
 - a. They see big buildings
 - b. They see big budgets
 - c. Bible education and Bible studies and Bible distribution
 - d. Plans, programs, and prayer meetings
 - e. Paul said in Gal 6:17 *I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.*
3. God wants us to present the marks of Christ to the world by a willingness to suffer
4. Michael Card, in his article "Wounded in the House of Friends," from and April 2001 issue of Virtue magazine tells the story of a young man named Joseph.

One day Joseph, who was walking along one of these hot, dirty African roads, met someone who shared the gospel of Jesus Christ with him. Then and there he accepted Jesus as his Lord and Saviour. The power of the Spirit began transforming his life; he was filled with such excitement and joy that the first thing he wanted to do was return to his own village and share that same Good News with the members of his local tribe.

Joseph began going from door-to-door, telling everyone he met about the Cross of Jesus and the salvation it offered, expecting to see their faces light up the way his had. To his amazement the villagers not only didn't care, they became violent. The men of the village seized him and held him to the ground while the women beat him with strands of barbed wire. He was dragged from the village and left to die alone in the bush.

Joseph somehow managed to crawl to a waterhole, and there, after days of passing in and out of consciousness, found the strength to get up. He wondered about the hostile reception he had received from people he had known all his life. He decided he must have left something out or told the story of Jesus incorrectly. After rehearsing the message he had first heard, he decided to go back and share his faith once more.

Joseph limped into the circle of huts and began to proclaim Jesus. 'He died for you, so that you might find forgiveness and come to know the living God,' he pleaded. Again he was grabbed by the men of the village and held while the women beat him reopening wounds that had just begun to heal. Once more they dragged him unconscious from the village and left him to die.

To have survived the first beating was truly remarkable. To live through the second was a miracle. Again, days later, Joseph awoke in the wilderness, bruised, scarred—and determined to go back. He returned to the small village and this time, they attacked him before he had a chance to open his mouth. As they flogged him for the third and probably the last time, he again spoke to them of Jesus Christ, the Lord. Before he passed out, the last thing he saw was that the women who were beating him began to weep.

This time he awoke in his own bed. The ones who had so severely beaten him were now trying to save his life and nurse him back to health. The entire village had come to Christ.

5. Our failure to suffer has hindered evangelism!
 - a. If we are to reach the lost, we must come to the place where we stop asking
 - b. How much will it cost?
 - c. And, Is it safe?
 - e. But just, is it God's commission? Then, here am I, send me!

B. Brother Andrew said this...*There's not one door in the world closed where you want to witness for Jesus...Show me a closed door and I will tell you how you can get in. I won't however, promise you a way to get out. Jesus didn't say, Go if the doors are open, because they weren't open! He didn't say, Go if you have an invitation or a red carpet treatment. He said, Go because people need His Word. We need a new approach to mission—an aggressive, experimental, evangelical, no holds barred approach...a pioneering spirit.*"

3. The reason we are not suffering for Christ is simply because we are unwilling to

A. Some of you think that we aren't suffering because we live in America.

1. We may not be imprisoned or beaten physically, but Paul did not make a distinction between being beaten with rods or being shipwrecked by accident
2. He did not distinguish between being cold while traveling or being stoned by the Jews.
3. For him any suffering that came while serving Christ was part of the cost of following Christ

B. When was the last time we suffered for Christ

1. When was the last time we suffered as part of a choice to be openly Christian in risky situations.
2. 2 Tim 3:12 *Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution*
3. So often we say, you know those Chinese believers are so on fire for Christ because they are persecuted.
 - a. But could it be that they are persecuted because they are on fire for Christ?
 - b. Could it be that persecution does not just refine true believers, but rather reveals true believers?
 - c. Something tells me if we transplanted a Chinese evangelist to America, he would find a way to get arrested.

1 Peter 4:12-14 *Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but **rejoice** to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also **be glad** with **exceeding joy**. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, **blessed** are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified.*

Why is so much of the NT and Christian history filled with persecution and warnings about persecution and suffering?

1. Because it is assumed that followers of Christ would take seriously His Great Commission.
2. And nothing stirs up the forces of darkness like carrying the light into those riskiest places

Discussion Questions:

1. What did you learn about God in this sermon and in the biblical texts used? About Christ? About the Holy Spirit?
2. What did you learn about yourself in this sermon and in the texts used?
3. Were there any clear promises or commands in the biblical texts used?
4. What is the hardest truth that stands out to you from this message or the verses referenced?
5. What is the most impactful point or statement from the sermon?
6. How can you respond to this message?