

The Faithful Witness

by H.J. Vine

The sermon emphasizes Jesus Christ as the ultimate faithful witness, calling believers to embody His truth in their lives.

Scripture: Matthew 1:23, Mark 2:12, Luke 2:52, John 1:1, Revelation 1:5, Revelation 3:16, Revelation 19:11

Topics: "Jesus Christ", "Faithful Witness"

Description

H.J. Vine preaches about the faithful Witness, Jesus Christ, who represented the truth perfectly in His words, walk, works, and ways. His words, as recorded in John, reveal Him as the Word become flesh, speaking the words of God and declaring the truth. His walk, depicted in Luke, shows Him as the perfect Man, walking in paths of grace and mercy, attracting the needy and sinful. His works, portrayed in Mark, display His divine power and grace, always honoring God and impressing beholders with faultless deeds. His ways, highlighted in Matthew, exemplify His royal and kingly character, fulfilling prophecies and revealing the truth of God's kingdom. Jesus, the faithful and true Witness, is praised and adored for His unwavering representation of truth and His coming judgment and reign.

Transcript

His Words (John), Walk (Luke), Works (Mark), And Ways (Matthew)

There have been, and there are, many faithful witnesses, but only one could be designated without qualification "The faithful Witness". In Revelation 1:5 our Lord Jesus Christ is thus named, and in chapter 3:14 (in the address to the lukewarm Laodicean assembly) He is further spoken of as "The faithful and true Witness". It is important to understand what is involved in this, for we live in days of religious boasting as to "our testimony" and "our witnessing"; and that, strange to say, where there is glaring inconsistency and where the witness is neither 'faithful' nor 'true'.

We are told in Proverbs 14:5, "A faithful witness will not lie: but a false witness will utter lies". To witness truly means to rightly represent what is true. This our Lord Jesus Christ did though it cost Him His life. Others followed in their measure, and the Greek word for witness (μαρτυρῶ) passed into English as martyr. Indeed the same word is translated witness in Revelation 1:5, and martyr in 2:13, just as it is said today, So-and-so is a martyr for the truth.

In the case of Antipas (mentioned in the latter scripture), he was the Lord's faithful witness in the assembly at Pergamos, and he was slain there. It had sunken so low morally that it dwelt experimentally where the

throne of Satan was. Lust and pride captured them, though we are told, at the same time, they held fast the Lord's name and had not denied His faith, yet some held Balaam doctrine and others Nicolaitain teaching. This happened before the apostles had gone to be with Christ above, so we need not be surprised at the happenings of today when there are no apostles on the earth. There may not be manifest violence in Christendom at present, but the corruption is none the less, and faithful and true witnesses are greatly needed.

Creation, The Law, and Christ

The two witnesses of Psalm 19 still bear their uncorrupted testimony (1) "The heavens declare the glory of God"; and (2) "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul" (1:7). These witnesses plainly speak the truth according to their measure. The first declares God's power and divinity. All men, including the heathen, have this witness continually testifying to them, therefore all who do not consequently turn to God are 'without excuse' (Rom. 1:20). The second (sent to the nation of Israel primarily) speaks of the holiness of God, and exposes the sinfulness of man, shutting him up to God alone for mercy, and rendering him inexcusable likewise if he does not seek this from Him.

Neither of these witnesses, however, did, nor could, make God Himself known. Much concerning Him was made known in Old Testament times, but He Himself remained unrevealed. We are told in John 1:18, "No man has seen God at any time"!--not Adam, not Noah, not Abraham, not Moses, not David, not Isaiah, nor any of the holy prophets--"No man"! Another, therefore, must come; and this has taken place as the verse continues to tell us--"The only-begotten Son, Who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him"! He alone was capable of so doing, and in Him God has become visible, even as it is said, He is "the Image of the invisible God"; and, "God has been manifested in the flesh" (1 Tim. 3:16).

Not only in His words and His walk, but also in His works and His ways He has rightly represented the truth. He is the faithful and true Witness. Some may set forth the truth in words and in walk deny it, or their works may do so and their personal ways be inconsistent. In our Lord Jesus Christ all was perfect. There was no flaw. We see this in the four Gospels. He was the true Light which shone for every man, and He was also the Truth to be known by all those who came into the light.

John bore witness concerning Him. His words and His works testified also. The Father's voice singled Him out, and the Spirit descended upon Him as a dove. The Scriptures all point to Him as He Himself said, "These are they which bear witness concerning Me, and ye will not come to Me that ye might have life" (John 5:39); Moreover, the resurrection proclaims Him to be the Son of God, the One who could and did make God known, the One who rightly represented the truth in every way. The resurrection was God's justification of our Lord Jesus Christ, and He is declared to be "the faithful Witness, the Firstborn from the dead" (Rev. 1:5). If we heed His words, therefore, we shall prove their reliability, for there was no disparity between what He was and what He said--He was altogether that which He said (John 8:25).

His Words

The witness of His words are given to us specially in John's Gospel. There He is the Word become flesh (1:1, 14), that 'Prophet' promised in Deuteronomy 18 Who should speak the words of God (1:21, 23, 25; 4:19, 44; 6:14; 7:40, 52; 9:17 also 3:31-34); and He said to the Father, "I have given them Thy words" (17:8). He also said, "The words which I speak to you I speak not from Myself" (14:10). The voice from heaven said, "Hear Him". The apostle Paul charged Timothy before God and before Christ "Who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate" to keep the commandment given to him in regard to

the things of God spotless and irreproachable until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Example set before Timothy was the faithful and true Witness. To utter words that were true and to be faithful to those words might mean suffering and death. It was so in the case of our Lord Jesus Christ, though false witnesses arose against Him. He told Pilate that His kingdom had not its origin in this world, and when Pilate inquired if He were a King, Jesus answered, "Thou sayest it, that I am a King. I have been born for this, and for this I have come into the world, that I might bear witness to the truth. Every one that is of the truth hears My voice". Pilate inquired of Him, "What is truth?" (John 18:36). He did not know it, but "the Truth", the expression of what is true, stood before him. Pilate vacillated and tried to get Him liberated, for he knew He was innocent of the charges brought against Him, yet he delivered Him over to be put to death. They crucified the Witness of the truth whom God had sent to men.

The Son of God is 'the Light' which makes manifest the truth as to God and man, and He is also 'the Truth' which is seen and known in the light. He is likewise the Revealer of the Father, the effulgence of God's glory and the exact expression of all that He is. John 1:1 introduces Him to us as 'the Word' Who was God; and, as becoming flesh, the One Who makes known the mind of God to us; it is no exaggeration, therefore, for John to say as he closes his Gospel that he supposed not even the world itself would contain the records, were the things written that such an One as Jesus did. How could it? In chapter 1 He is seen to be the Creator of all things! Could the whole of the creation even contain the Creator?

How then could this small part of it contain the records of the things done by One who Himself is infinite? John says, "If they were written", but could any finite being write them?

These last words which the Spirit gives us through John (probably the last words given in the inspired writings) may well be weighed by us, "This is the disciple who bears witness concerning, these things and who has written these things; and we know that his witness is true. And there are many other things which Jesus did, the which if they were written one by one, I suppose that not even the world itself would contain the books written". Enough, however, is recorded to show the faithful Witness Himself; and the Spirit of God is in and with all true believers, giving them to know the truth revealed in the words of the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth; showing them that which is true--that which is rightly represented in Him who is Himself the Truth personified; leaving them without a shade of doubt, and in possession of the peace and fullness of joy of which John wrote, being made glad in the presence of the faithful and true Witness.

His Walk

We have said a witness might represent the truth in His words and deny it by His walk. This has become proverbial of a certain class of religious leader--he says in effect, "Do as I say, but not as I do". The Witness of whom we speak was as perfect in the witness of His walk as He was in the witness of His words. To see this the Gospel of Luke should be considered carefully in dependence on the gracious guidance and teaching of the Spirit.

It is in this Gospel, which is written in such an exceptionally elegant style, we have portrayed the wonderful walk of the perfect Man. For the blessing of the needy and sinful, and for the glory of God, He is seen walking with feet washed and anointed with costly myrrh, wiped with the hair of one who also kissed them, for they had brought to her the blessed Witness of the saving and peace-giving grace of God. Those holy feet ever carried that faithful Witness in paths where Divine grace was mercifully manifested under all circumstances, so that the needy and the sinful were attracted, and the heavy-laden found rest.

At the very commencement of Luke we find Him lost by His earthly father and mother, who, when they discovered Him, found Him diligent in His true "Father's business"; yet, perfect in every relation, we read, "He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and He was in subjection to them". What a beautiful picture! What a lovely lesson for the homes of believers nowadays, when insubjection to parents is so rife, even as God's Word has foretold! No wonder that these disobedient and insubordinate children of today know neither the favour of men nor of God. What a contrast we find in Jesus--He "advanced in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and men" (Luke 2:52).

In His service for the Lord, the apostle Paul exercised himself to maintain a good conscience void of offence Godward and manward. To witness rightly in our walk this is necessary. Even in the warfare of Ephesians 6 our 'feet' are to be shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, and as to our brethren in the Lord we are to 'walk' 'according to love' (Rom. 14:15), and we are exhorted to "walk in wisdom towards them that are without" (Col. 4:5). Words are not enough to bear witness truly; one has often heard it said, So-and-so's life gives the lie to what he says! By their fruits ye shall know them! On the other hand we have known cases where the children of God have been mentioned, and it has been said, If any hold the right thing, they do, for they are as consistent on week-days as they are on Sundays! That is just what it should be.

The faithful walk of our Lord Jesus Christ, however, in the path of God's will, involved misunderstanding and suffering when He stepped forth in public testimony. Frowns instead of smiles then greeted Him. Isaiah 50 foretells that wonderful walk of grace and faithfulness. He ministered sustaining words to the weary ones, He turned not back but went forward in the path which God had appointed for Him; they smote His back, they plucked the hair from His cheeks, they spat in His face, yet He set His face as a flint (Isa. 50:7) steadfastly to go up to Jerusalem (Luke 9:5)! Nothing turned the feet of the faithful One aside! Man and Satan might oppose, but He went forward! Dark clouds might gather thickly around Him, but He faltered not! The mutterings of violence might yield to the ragings of the tumultuous tempest, yet He walked onward! Blessed Lord and Saviour, faithful and true Witness, they all forsook Thee and fled then, but Thou didst not fail! Thou didst not turn back!

"Faithful amidst unfaithfulness,

'Mid darkness only light,

Thou didst Thy Father's name confess,

And in His will delight

Unmoved by Satan's subtle wiles,'

Or suffering, shame, and loss,

Thy path uncheered by earthly smiles

Led only to the cross."

There they crucified Him; they pierced those feet that had been washed, wiped, kissed, and anointed by one who experienced the forgiveness, salvation, and peace He brought from God for sinful man. Unlike those who hated Him without a cause, she loved Him much for she had been forgiven much. Man rejected the witness of Jesus, but God declared that it was true by raising Him from among the dead.

The world saw Him not again after His burial, but to His disciples (Luke tells us) He appeared, and showed them His hands and 'His feet' (24:40). The Spirit of God with infinite wisdom calls attention in John to 'His side' (20:20), for thereout came the blood and the water, which along with the Spirit form the threefold 'witness of God' (1 John 5:7-11) that believers on the Son have life in Him. Luke closes by showing us the risen Son of God sending the feet of His witnesses with the Gospel to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem, for, "Ye are witnesses of these things", He said to them; but first He led them out as far as Bethany. It was there that His witness had been lovingly appreciated when the official and royal city on the other side of Mount Olives had rejected it, and there He blessed those who accompanied Him. From thence also He ascended to heaven even while His uplifted hands were still outstretched in blessing. What a significant close to the walk of the only perfect Man who has trodden the soil of this sin-stained world, the One who has represented the truth rightly in both His words and His walk, the faithful and true Witness. May we be led by the Spirit to appreciate this more deeply.

His Works

There is also the witness of His works as well as that of His words and walk. The Gospel of Mark shows us the Divine Servant diligently working in this world for God's glory and man's blessing. Unlike the other Gospels which introduce us to our Lord Jesus Christ in some special way previous to His public service, Mark shows Him to us straightway taking up the work of God. The use of the word *Eutheos* (which is variously translated 'straightway', 'immediately', and 'forthwith') some forty-nine times, shows with what perfection of energy Mark sees His labours carried through.

In accord with Christ's witness in John, the Spirit first tells us in that Gospel of His eternal distinction as the Word who was with God and who was God. In Luke, with the same exactness of purpose, He is traced back to Adam, for He is to be presented as the perfect Man walking amongst men as we have seen. Matthew also, with equal precision, introduces us first to the royal genealogy of the King of whom his Gospel is to speak; but Mark shows Him at once working as the servant of God's pleasure, and indeed in the very last verse of that Gospel we find these words--"The Lord working with them". How significant!

Isaiah had foretold the coming of this Servant, and that just as distinctly as it was foretold that He should come as the Prophet, and the Priest, and the King.

Mark begins by citing the first chapter of that part of the prophet which introduces the Servant (Isa. 40:3; Mark 1:3). It should be observed he gives no other quotation after this, though the Lord Jesus Himself does. Isaiah foretells the personal Servant of God (42:1-12; 52:13-15, etc.), the national servant also (41:8; and witnesses, 43:9-12, etc.), and 'the servants' after God's personal Servant has "instructed many in righteousness" (53:11; see 54:17, etc.). The Gospel of Mark, however, shows Him come into and at work in a world of need, faithfully witnessing in all that He does, and rightly representing the truth in His wonderful works of grace and power at which men were astonished and said, "From whence has this Man these things? and what wisdom is this that is given unto Him, that even such mighty works are wrought by His hands"; and King Herod also heard of the 'mighty works' which showed forth themselves in Him (Mark 6:2, 14).

The very first work which is detailed by Mark is the casting out of an unclean spirit, and he cried out, Art Thou come to destroy us? I know Thee who Thou art, the Holy One of God. This true Servant did His works always in a way that connected God with them before the eyes of others. It was His glory that He always sought, and in this Gospel of deeds rather than words we specially observe this. When the people

saw the palsied man arise at His word, and carry his couch out of the house before them, "they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion" (Mark 2:12)! They might well glorify Him whose power was thus manifested in mercy and grace through our Lord Jesus Christ.

There was a faultlessness about the works of the Lord which impressed the beholders, and even in the manner in which He did the works of divine power they saw something which contrasted greatly with that of other men. When He gave hearing and speech to the man of whom we read in Mark 7:32-37, having first looked up to heaven, the people "were beyond measure astonished, saying, He has done all things well. He maketh both the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak". Every work which He did for the blessing of men was done in a way that honoured God. It was this which pre-eminently marked Him, whether in word, or walk, or work, for all blended together in the faithful and true Witness to represent God perfectly.

What good reason we have to rejoice in Him at all times! How great the grace which has given us to trust in Him and know His great salvation!

"And when on that bright day we rise,

And join the anthems of the skies,

In heavenly songs this note shall swell,

Our Saviour has done all things well."

His Ways

The ways of our Lord Jesus Christ are rightly designated 'Royal ways'. They could be nothing else, for though He 'humbled Himself' He ever remained who He was, and no less a person could represent God in this world. He was God's King and also God the King. It is Matthew who thus presents Him to us, and Psalms 2 and 45 foretold His coming in this royal manner along with other Old Testament Scriptures. The first Gospel begins by showing to us the One of whom God speaks as 'My King' in Psalm 2 the Son of David, "King David's greater Son" (1:1); but He is also God the King of whom we read in Psalm 45, and who is named in Matthew 1:23 'Emmanuel' which being interpreted is 'God with us'. The ways of such an One must be therefore Royal ways indeed, and His ways alone could be a perfect revelation of the truth of God.

A star in the east guided the magi to Him "to do Him homage" (2:2). King Herod and all Jerusalem were troubled at the coming of this greater King to Bethlehem. There, the prophet had centuries before said, He should appear whose goings forth had been from eternity (Mic. 5:2). It was the city of David, and that was the way for the Royal One to come. Sad to say, but it is significant to observe, the mere religious students of prophecy were instructing the debased monarch Herod concerning His coming, whilst these eastern Gentiles were on their way to honour Him with "gold, and frankincense, and myrrh"! Consistent, too, with that aspect of the truth which is unfolded in Matthew, the Gospel closes with homage rendered to Him as to a King upon a mountain in Galilee, 'all power' in heaven and earth having been given to Him. Therefore 'all nations' are to own Him, and 'all things' commanded by Him are to be observed. He is the Divine King whose ways faithfully witness as to the truth of God.

These ways give character to the Gospel. Because He has come, "the kingdom of the heavens has drawn nigh". Only Matthew so speaks of the kingdom. His baptism fulfils righteousness and the heavens own Him as He goes up from the water. His victory over Satan in the wilderness manifests a stronger than he.

The words uttered by Him to those assembled upon the mountain (still closely studied by the thoughtful) declares the principles of His reign. When He descends, a leper does Him homage (for so the word worship should be translated), and he is cleansed by a touch of the Lord's hand and a word from His lips.

A Greater than the greatest of earth's princes or prophets is there John the Baptist was very great--"more than a prophet"! "Among them that are born of women there has not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of the heavens is greater than he" (Matt. 11:11)! How much greater, therefore, is the King Himself! Yet this King's yoke is easy and His burden light: rest is found by those who come to Him. Jonah was great, and King Solomon was great and wise too, but a Greater than Jonah, a Greater and Wiser than Solomon is there! He is the Lord. He is Emmanuel, and He is the Son of Man, the Lord of the Sabbath day, who is to build His assembly for the day when the Son of Man shall come in His kingdom and glory; and in view of this, with royal right, He gave the keys into Peter's hands for the opening of the door. This Peter did at Pentecost for the Jews, and later in Cornelius' house for the Gentiles. Mark, these are not called "The keys of the Church" (Peter never speaks of 'the assembly') but "the keys of the kingdom of the heavens".

Again, when the Son of Man is seen upon the holy mount by the favoured three, "His face did shine as the sun, and His raiment was as white as the light", and "a bright cloud overshadowed them". Here the Son of Man Himself is seen in His glory (Matt. 16:28). In Mark, where His works of power are in question, it is "the Kingdom of God with power" that is displayed (9:1), while we have simply "the kingdom of God" mentioned in Luke (9:27).

If, as we said, at the coming of Christ to Bethlehem, a star in the heavens guided the magi for Him to receive homage from them, so at His death the temple veil was rent from top to bottom! the earth shook! rocks were rent! tombs were opened! and the Roman centurion on guard said, Truly this was the Son of God (Matt. 27:51-54)! Moreover, when in resurrection, Jesus met the women who were returning from the sepulchre, and said, All hail; they also bowed in homage at His feet. The faithful and true Witness had rightly represented the truth in all His ways--His perfect ways--His divinely royal ways, and God raised Him from among the dead, bringing some thus to own Him, rendering the homage due to such an One though rejected by the world. Our hearts also have been tuned by the Spirit to sing:

"Worthy of homage and of praise,

Worthy by all to be adored

Exhaustless theme of heavenly lays,

Thou, Thou art worthy, Jesus, Lord."

When Paul exhorts Timothy to be faithful and true, he reminds him of the witness of our Lord Jesus Christ before Pilate, also of His future appearing in the glory which shall manifest "The blessed and only Potentate", the King of those that reign, the Lord of those who exercise lordship, to whom belongs honour, majesty, and eternal might. Pilate inquired of Him, as we have pointed out, concerning Kingship, and when the Jews observed his indecision, they cried out, If thou releaseth this Man thou art not a friend of Caesar! The Representative of the Roman empire was in a dilemma! and he handed over the true Witness, God's King, to be crucified! The Jew and the Representative of the revived Roman empire must, however, face Him again when He returns in power and glory, as we shall see.

It is striking that the worthy Witness is singled out so definitely in this connection in the last book of the Bible. John has shown Him as 'the Word' become flesh, full of grace and truth, but Revelation reveals Him as "the Word of God" executing judgment (19:13). Luke has presented the lovely walk of those anointed 'feet' among men; but Revelation shows 'His feet' like "fine brass as burning in a furnace" (1:15), to tread down wickedness. Mark has shown us His works of power in blessing, but Revelation shows us His works of government in judgment. Matthew has given us to see His royal ways upon the earth, but Revelation shows us His ways of judgment from the throne. The worthy Witness was faithful and true in all His words, walk, works and ways in His lowly path of humiliation even unto death, and He will be faithful and true to God in all that He does from the throne to which He has been exalted.

When He rides triumphantly forth from heaven upon a white horse to deal with an apostate and blaspheming world, he is called 'Faithful and true' and 'The Word of God' (Rev. 19:11-13). There is no question of Kingship allowed to be raised then! no question of His acceptance or rejection is permitted! The wicked leader of the Jews, 'the false prophet' and the blasphemous head of the revived Roman empire, 'the beast', are both dealt with as we said; both are taken alive and cast into the lake of fire (v. 20). Once the representatives of Jew and Gentile combined to reject Him, now the representatives of Jew and Gentile are rejected for ever by the One they disowned so cruelly, as He comes out of heaven in might and majesty clothed in vesture dipped in blood upon which in shining splendour is seen a name--as it is also emblazoned upon His thigh--being His by right and by might--"King of kings and Lord of lords", the One who once witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate, the worthy Witness.

Once again He is found in Revelation. This time He addresses Himself to a lukewarm assembly, a picture of the last Laodicean phase of Christendom before His return, which gives no true witness, but is steeped in self-satisfaction and worldliness. He says, "I am about to spue thee out of My mouth" (3:16). Nor need anyone think there is no witness because of the humiliating failure of the assemblies, for the One who speaks is Himself "the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the beginning of the creation of God". We can therefore glory in the Lord, and rejoice in Him always, even as we are exhorted to do.

Finally, let us notice, at the very beginning of this last book of the inspired volume, which is to show the judgment of God upon the assemblies, the Jews and the nations, a greeting is given "from Jesus Christ, the faithful Witness, the Firstborn from the dead, and the Prince of the kings of the earth". The faithful One abides! The true One remembers His own! The worthy One sends greeting! This revives the heart and gives joy to those who are truly His! Therefore response is immediately given--"Unto Him who loves us, and has washed us from our sins in His own blood, and made us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father; to Him be the glory and the might to the ages of ages. Amen" (1:5-6).

What a relief it is amidst all the unreality and inconsistency, of Christendom to turn to the One who faileth never, the ever worthy One! What joy it imparts to know One who abides faithful and true! How it moves our hearts to utter the praises of the worthy Witness! to sing songs of the glory of Him, who rightly represents the truth as to God and man, our ever to be adored Lord Jesus Christ.

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