

Two Witnesses

by John McGregor

Effective witnessing comes from effective devotion, obedience, and a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Duration: 36:38

Scripture: Deuteronomy 19:15, Matthew 6:33, Luke 2:21-38

Topics: "Christian Life"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on the story of Simeon and Anna in the Bible and their encounter with baby Jesus. The speaker emphasizes the importance of taking Christ into our lives and letting go of everything else. They highlight the personal and intimate nature of holding Jesus in our arms and being held by Him. The speaker also discusses the power of effective witnessing and shares the story of John Harper, an evangelist who shared the message of salvation even in the midst of the Titanic disaster. Overall, the sermon encourages listeners to live effective lives and to find peace and salvation in Jesus.

Transcript

Thank you, Rebecca, and good morning. As they say in Ireland, how y'all doing? Southern Ireland, that is. Wonderful to be in the house of the Lord to worship together.

I want to just mention, ladies, one announcement that we missed. There is a shower for Candice and for Little Faith, Carafel, after the service on October 31st. So if you would take note of that, and I know a good time will be had by all.

Turning to our scriptures for this morning, we're in Luke's Gospel, chapter two, and verses 21 through 38. Luke's Gospel, chapter two, and 21 through 38. And then we're going to just read one verse also from Deuteronomy 19, and verse 15.

So Luke, chapter two, and beginning at verse 21, says, "...and when eight days had passed before his circumcision, his name was then called Jesus, and the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb. And when the days for their purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. As it is written in the law of the Lord, every firstborn male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord, and to offer a sacrifice according to what was said in the law of the Lord.

A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons. And there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ.

And he came in the Spirit into the temple. And when the parents brought in the child Jesus to carry out for him the custom of the law, then he took him into his arms and blessed God, and said, My Lord, you are releasing your bondservant to depart in peace according to your word. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light of revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.

And his father and mother were amazed at these things which were being said about him. And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed. And a sword will pierce even your own soul to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.

There was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years and had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then as a widow to the age of 84. She never left the temple serving night and day with fastings and prayers, and at that very moment she came up and began giving thanks to God and continued to speak of him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

And just over then to the Old Testament and to the book of Deuteronomy chapter 19 and verse 15. Deuteronomy 19 and verse 15. A single witness shall not rise up against a man on account of any iniquity or any sin which he has committed.

On the evidence of two or three witnesses, a matter shall be confirmed. Father, how we thank you for your Word, and how we thank you that you can take this Word and bless and strengthen our lives through it. And indeed, we surrender these few moments to you this morning, and ask you, Spirit of the living God, to take the Word of God and strengthen us and enable us.

In Jesus' name we pray, amen. I notice that as we read, we're sort of looking at that which happens right after the Christmas story, where Jesus is taken to the temple, and those things that were according to the law were being performed. And as you see here, it just strikes me that God never goes and leaves himself without a witness.

And I love this thought so much. God never leaves himself without a witness. And indeed, it's something that encourages us in tough times, doesn't it? When there are heavy things and hard things going on, God never leaves himself without a witness.

And this morning's thoughts are entitled, Two Witnesses. In the Old Testament, God said that truth would be established through the witness of two or three people. In other words, if two or three people can say that this is so, it is so.

This is what actually happened. And notice that there are two witnesses here after the birth of Christ, two independent witnesses who come along out of nowhere, so to speak, and under the influence and emphasis of the Holy Spirit, say, this child is the Son of God. You got to love it, because God always fulfills his word.

He never leaves himself without a witness. And I get so blessed thinking about this. There were times when things were really tough in some Old Testament situations.

For instance, when judgment was about to fall on Sodom and Gomorrah, there was one man in there called Lot. God never leaves himself without a witness. When Babylon was about to fall, there was one man in there called Daniel.

God never leaves himself without a witness. And you run into people constantly who say, well, if God's so good and if God loves everybody, how could these bad things happen? Sorry, that was a bit Irish, wasn't it? But, you know, people do tend to get in your face and ask these kind of questions. And one of the ways to answer that question, my friends, is that God never leaves himself without a witness.

You look at these things, and when catastrophes are going to happen, God has sent his witness. There is someone there who is holding forth the word of life and the word of truth, someone who is speaking of the grace of God and the love of God. You know, I had somebody one day say to me, all right, if you're God's so good and so loving, how could he allow, you know, so many people to die in a disaster like the Titanic? And he was quick to point out that it was built in Belfast, my hometown for those who don't know.

But you know God never leaves himself without a witness. There was a man on the Titanic whose name is John Harper, an evangelist from Glasgow, and he spent that night in the water swimming from person to person to say, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved. Even in the midst of that kind of disaster, God does not leave himself without a witness.

And it is so true as you look here at the birth of the Savior, and there are these two witnesses. And as you notice, there's another song in here. This one we would call it the Song of Simeon, and he is pouring forth his song too.

But let's consider, first of all, effective lives. Here are two people who have lived effective lives. Neither one of them is young, and they have a life-changing word to say and an effective thing to communicate.

Simeon and Anna received something from God. And you know, this is a gripping thing. When God gives you something, you can't contain it.

It just flows naturally. And that's what we see here in the effectiveness of these two lives. God has given them both something, and it is flowing forth even in this text.

They were taught by the Holy Spirit. That's obvious from the text. They came to the temple by the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

They were not simply equipped in fleshly knowledge, but they were following the leading and the guiding of the Holy Spirit. Both, obviously from the text, are people of discipline. You say, John, what do you mean people of discipline? I mean, they are disciples.

They are people who follow a discipline of meeting with God day after day. They are both people of prayer. And you remember in the introduction to the book of Luke, we said that here we will encounter the subject of prayer very often because it is so much a part just of the gospel of Luke.

Both of them are people of prayer. Anna is recorded as someone who is fasting. They are people who worship in the temple.

And you know, that's what we were created for, to worship, to worship Him. He has put eternity in our hearts. And they were people of the Word of God because they are there walking with the Lord in the place where His Word is read day after day after day and time after time.

These two witnesses are quite amazing, aren't they? God revealed His plans to both of them. Now, do you believe that God can still reveal Himself today and show us His plans and nurture us in the way that we should go, and have His hand upon us to protect and guide and fill and equip and so on? And the answer is yes. That's exactly what we believe, isn't it? And just consider these two lives for a moment.

It says they were devout. There is a love in them for God, an incredible love for God. And you know, that is the very basis of being an effective person in life, to love God.

Isn't that exactly what the law says? Love God and love others. And Jesus certainly is their first love. They're not short of words or things to say when they see the Lord Jesus.

And they are obviously patient people. Are you patient? Now, I would have to say I'm Irish and I'm impatient, but I'm thankful I'm not the only impatient person in here. Well, there should be a little amen in there, but all right.

I'll pay you later, Brad. I always say they're patient because they have waited upon God for years. What are you waiting upon God for today? What a testimony, what a witness these two give us if we're waiting on God for something.

God fulfilled his word and his promise to them, and oh how blessed it is. It reminds me of a man in history called Cotton Mather who prayed all his life for revival, and a few months after Cotton Mather died, the second great awakening came to North America. And you and I might say, he missed it.

He didn't miss it. I think when he went home to Jesus, Jesus just said to him, let me show you, let me show you. Are you waiting on God for something? It is worth the wait, is it not? Is not this exactly what this text is teaching us? Are we waiting on God for a healing? Are we waiting on God for a loved one to come into the kingdom of God? Are we waiting upon God for some touch that would just lift us above something that we cannot get victory over? It is worth the wait.

They were trusting God every day in the temple, trusting him. I can, you know, in my imagination just picture as Simeon goes to the temple day after day and kind of looks around. What are you looking for, Simeon? God told me I'd see his salvation before I die.

I'm just looking for his salvation. What would we say? Say it louder into the microphone. Say, you're nuts.

You know, I think the Lord likes them nuts. I think he gave them great sense of his spirit working within them and lifting and leading. I think Simeon could have so easily been discouraged and distracted, but he's trusting.

It's one thing to wait. It's another thing to wait and trust. Just trusting.

They're people of vision. Why would I say that? Because they're looking for something beyond the natural, something that is far above the things that are seen and known just in human circumstances and ways. They're looking to him who is eternal, and they've invested their lives for him, and it wasn't a waste in any way, shape, form, or fashion.

You know, it's interesting when you look at the people of vision in the world and the difference that they make. I think about a man called John Scully. He was the vice president of Pepsi-Cola.

You like Pepsi? You like Coke? It's a tough bunch. A man came along to him one day and said, Mr. Scully, I've developed this computer, and I'd like you to come and be the CEO for Apple Computers. Would you do it? John Scully said, I like my three-figure income.

I like the cars that I drive. I like the lifestyle that I've developed. I'm not giving that up to go and start again.

And the man said to him, well that's okay, Mr. Scully. I just wondered if you wanted to spend the rest of your life dispensing sugar water, or if you really want to change your world. What's the best kind of computer you can have? Are you sure? Would you go into withdrawal if I take your iPhone away? Finally got one.

People of vision. I put that in because I want you to see something this morning. I want you to see that people who have a closeness to God also are people who change their world.

They're people of vision. They're people who have obedience. That's something else we see in these two lives.

They're at the right place at the right time, led by the Spirit of God. You couldn't orchestrate this if you tried. Two people to come to the same place at the same time when a couple who have brought a baby are coming to do that dedication work of that child in the temple from another city.

How could you put that all together in the right time and place and way? And yet, in the sovereign will of God, that's exactly what happens here. They're obedient. They're filled with the Holy Spirit, and that's every Christian's greatest need.

Why would I say that? There's so many needs, Pastor, come on! The greatest need that you and I have as believers in Jesus Christ is to be filled with the Spirit of God. John the baptizer said that when he came, Jesus, he would baptize in the Holy Spirit and with fire, and so often that is used as a symbol of the Spirit, isn't it? Because fire purifies, and when we are baptized and filled with the Spirit of God, all those other things are burned up. Yeah, yeah, but you know, that can't really deal with the anger and the resentment that's in my heart over the people that hurt me.

Listen, if he can burn the resentment and anger out of a former terrorist's heart, he can burn the resentment and anger out of anybody, any place, anywhere. We need the Holy Spirit's fullness. Fire purifies.

Are you struggling with some things? My dear friends, it is to come to know the fullness of God and the fire of God that makes a person who is able to sit in front of the TV, and when something comes on that you shouldn't watch, to hit the button, not out of guilt, but out of desire. Fire prevails. You let fire in.

It's gonna prevail, and bless God, when we surrender to the Spirit and are baptized in his holy fire, it is gonna prevail over the things of the flesh and the world and the devil. But we have come in North America to such a low ebb within the Christian church because we lack the fire of the Spirit of God to prevail in our own hearts, let alone in those who stand in our pulpits. Ah, but fire also protects, because as it prevails there's a protection.

There's no room for anything else. These are two people that I would say we see a denying of self within them. Wouldn't you say that? Spending time in the temple, fasting and praying, they are self-denying, loving God's house and his kingdom more than the things of this world.

Ah, my friends, talk about two witnesses, two fabulous and fantastic witnesses. But let's think not only about two effective limes, but about effective witnessing for a moment or two. You knew that as an evangelist in the pulpit sooner or later I would get around to the subject of witnessing.

I was just toodling along until we got into Luke chapter 2. They're expressing something from God. That's what makes effective witnesses. They're expressing something from God by the power of the Holy Spirit.

It's not just their own ideas. It's not just some program that they have learned. It's not just some process that Christianizes people.

It is what God put into their hearts. And you know when God puts something in there, you can't shut up about it. Oh, yes, the world squeezes and says, no, no, no, just settle down, preacher.

It'll be okay. Sooner or later, have a Valium. You'll be okay.

Settle down. I've got a friend, Gerard de Toy, from South Africa. When he started preaching in Canada, they said to him, Gerard, you're far too forceful for Canadian churches.

Man, take a Valium. So he did, and nothing happened. So he took a second, and nothing happened.

And he took a third, and by the time he got up to preach, he was slurring his words. Is it that our culture has so indoctrinated us that we just cannot be excited about Christ anymore? That we cannot worship him from the depths of a heart that are full, absolutely full of the living Spirit of the living God? Speaking about Jesus, Simeon took him in his arms, leaving everything else. What a picture of salvation this is, just to take him, just like that.

Yesterday, I had my little granddaughter in my arms, and it's a privilege. It's a wonderful privilege. You know, whoever said that grandchildren are the reward for not killing your kids, they were right.

It was true. But I think about Simeon, and you can't fill your arms with the Savior and hold on to anything else. What a picture that is of the salvation that he offers.

Take Christ and Christ alone, and he'll be enough. He'll be sufficient. He is a more than sufficient Savior for all of the needs.

I think, too, how personal this is. How very personal. Have you noticed I'm having an effect on him? You know, it gets really personal.

That felt pretty good. Back is straightened out and everything. How very personal and intimate it is when you take someone into your arms.

That's what's happening as Simeon takes Jesus. And oh, that's the key thing to effective witnessing, just to hold him and to be held by him. Notice with me, too, that it makes such an effective witness because Simeon immediately says, Lord, now you're releasing your servant to depart in peace.

He's going to die. There's no fear of death in Simeon. He's holding the Savior, and there's not one fear of what comes next.

God has told him, you'll see him before you leave this earth. You'll know him before you depart. And Simeon says, this is it! Now I can go, because I know, I absolutely know that I have him, and I have held him and known the love of God in him.

Oh, as he recognizes the Savior, he's singing about salvation in verse 30, and he's singing about the fact that Jesus will be for all people, a light for the Gentiles and the glory of your people, Israel, in verse 32. I like that because it's not only for the one who's in the gutter. It's not only to the uttermost and the guttermost.

It's everybody, everyone. And he realized that Jesus would be opposed. He even speaks about it as he speaks to Joseph and to Mary.

He says this child will be for the falling and rise of many, because he knew that repentance and humility have to come before deliverance and grace. It's when we come to the end of ourselves and fall before God and say, Lord, if you don't save me, there's no other way. There's no other place that I can go.

That's the place where God meets us at the foot of the cross. That's the place where we're no longer dependent upon something that we can do, but we are completely dependent upon him to lift us up. That's the place where we find salvation in truth and grace and power.

He even goes on to say that he'll be a revealer of many hearts, and I'm so glad that Jesus knows the hearts--your heart and mine--this morning. We don't have to hide things from him. He knows.

And you look at Anna. The praise and worship that's flowing from her in his presence didn't have to conjure something up. It just flowed.

What is it, pastor, that you're trying to get at this morning? What is it that you're trying to say without actually nailing it? Well, let me just actually nail it. The third thing I want you to think about this morning is effective witnesses come from effective devotion. And the reason that so often we have nothing to say is because we've not been there in the presence of the living Lord.

The discipline of the word and prayer, the demonstration of the Holy Spirit filling us, leading us, guiding us, because there are so many other things in our busy world that call for our attention and draw us aside so that we cannot meet with him. Now for time's sake, my dear friends, let me just draw these thoughts to a close. The greatest hindrance to effective witnessing is lack of intimacy with Jesus.

What is it that was said about the first believers when they pulled them in to sort of a mock trial? They said, they have been with Jesus. Oh God, when they come to get me to stick me in jail for being a Christian, I hope that somebody's going to be able to say, boy, he has been with Jesus because he's the one alone who can transform lives, mine and yours. We see how God touched the lives of Simeon and Anna, how he made them effective in words and witness, and our hearts are touched with this great desire, are they not? Oh, to be so close to Jesus.

Oh, to be so close to know his plan and to see him at work. Friends, Andrew Murray once preached a sermon and wrote a book about it, and he gave us the cost in the title of his book. What will it cost me to be an effective witness like Simeon or Anna? Absolute surrender.

Absolute surrender. That's the place where the Spirit comes to fill us. That's the place where we find the touch of the living God.

That's the place where the power of God overwhelms us and overcomes us. Would you join me for a moment in prayer? And as we pray, I'm going to ask Matt if he would come back, and we want to close this morning singing that song again, how deep the Father's love for us. Just as we go to prayer, my friends, let me say how much I love you, Glencairn Alliance Church.

You are such a blessing to me. And let me also say, oh, that God would draw every single one of us to this place where effective witness happens not because of us, but through us in the work of God's Spirit in control of us. Now, dear Heavenly Father, as we come to you at the place of prayer, you know our hearts, and you know our needs, and you know, Father, our longing after you.

Yet, Lord, you know there are so many issues and areas, and it is so hard for us to set aside the flesh to just lay our lives down and say, Lord, I just surrender it all to you because, Father, we keep taking pieces back. But, Lord, this morning, by your gracious power, let your Spirit do a deep and abiding work in our hearts that Jesus might be seen and known in an effective way in our lives and in our witness, in our walk and work for you. Lord, would you wonderfully continue to speak to our hearts.

In Jesus' name I pray. Amen. Let's stand together and sing as Matt leads us.

His wounds have paid my ransom, but this I know with all my heart. His wounds have paid my ransom. And this I do know with all my heart, that His wounds not only paid our ransom, but it's through His wounds that we are healed.

If you have a need for prayer this morning, physically, emotionally, spiritually, I want to encourage you after the closing prayer just to come to the frontier. The elders and their wives will be here to pray with you and for you. We can trust the Lord, even as Bob has given testimony this morning, to do wonderful things in our bodies, in our souls, and in our minds and hearts.

So, friends, just before we say that closing prayer, let me just mention over here is Cindy and Kelly and, I think, little Anika. Have I got that right? Anika. And so, make yourself known to them and get to know them as well.

Receive the Lord's benediction. Father, you have been the one presiding this morning, even as we have met you at the place of worship. Now, Father, add your blessing to each life and each family that is represented here.

May the God of peace and the God of strength and the power of the Spirit of the living God go with you as you leave this place. And may His presence keep you through all the days of this week until we meet again or Christ comes or calls us home. In Jesus' name, in God's people's sin, amen.

Go and be blessed in Him. Amen.

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net