

# celebration meditation

## Witness, Who Me?

By Richard J. Foster



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PROBABLY everyone of us at one time or another has been confronted by some overzealous Christian who offends our dignity and is an affront to the Gospel. As a result we have decided that "witnessing" is just not for us. It is most unfortunate that we have sorely segregated our concept of witness.

The truth of the matter is that we are a witness whether we like it or not. If the love and goodness of God is a reality in our lives, it will become unmistakably clear to all we encounter. If we are infected with hatred and hostility, that witness will also be clear.

Jesus tells us that with the coming of the Holy Spirit we will be empowered to be His witnesses. You see we are always a witness. It is only the Holy Spirit that enables us to be a witness to *Him*. Listen to the promise to the disciples, and us: ". . . you shall be *my* witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

The places Jesus mentioned are significant. Many have rightly suggested that Jesus was indicating that witness must begin in Jerusalem — at home — and extend from there. Yet, an even more startling fact emerges when we realize that Jesus did *not* mention Galilee. At first glance this is puzzling. It was in Galilee that the disciples had been so successful in former years. The people were responsive. Galilee was "home" for the disciples!

Our puzzle is solved when we realize that Jesus knew the disciples would witness in friendly territory. He was calling them to be witnesses to a hostile culture. They were to witness in Jerusalem — to the very people who had so recently murdered their Lord. They were to carry the Good News to Judea — to the home of the traitor Judas. The message of the Gospel was to be taken to Samaria — to those considered racial and cultural half-breeds. Their witness would extend to the ends of the earth — to the despised Greeks and barbarians. Jesus had called them to witness in the toughest situations they could imagine. In effect, Jesus had broken through every cultural and racial barrier known. The promise to the disciples was that they would be empowered by the Holy Spirit to be witnesses in the hard places!

We have the same promise! The Holy Spirit can so change our minds that we are able to be His witnesses in the hard places. Where is our Jerusalem? Or Samaria? The answer is as varied as the individual. For some it is among minority peoples. For others it is among the affluent. Still others find it among the intelligentsia. Most of us surely discover Jerusalem with our own families.

Any person who has sought to live in genuine community with the household of faith knows what a Jerusalem that can be. He who believes it is easy has never seriously tried it. The temptation is always to inject into the fellowship our own human wish dreams of what the community should be, and hence we become accusers of each other. The ability to witness to the goodness of God among the community of faith remains for many the toughest place yet.

We harbor prejudice. We are pregnant with hostilities. We cannot stand some people! Yet, the glorious promise is of the Holy Spirit which can empower us to be *His* witnesses among the people our prejudice insists are untouchables.

There was a condition attached to the promise. The disciples were asked to wait in Jerusalem for the fulfilling of the promise in them. They were willing to wait; are we? Q