

July 30, 2017
Read Matthew 18:16
Witnesses

Roots

What is a witness? Somebody who experiences something firsthand. Somebody that can tell the story of what happened on a particular occasion. The disciples are called to be witnesses of what Jesus did. On occasion the earth and stones and sky are called as witnesses in scripture to proclaim what it is that they have seen the Lord or the people do. Over the years many people and even things have been called as witnesses. Today, a parrot has even been used as a witness to catch a murderer.

But, why do we use witnesses or sponsors at baptisms? Well, for one thing, because of Matthew 18: 16. Those witnesses or sponsors see the thing God is doing with ordinary water for the person being baptized first hand. This serves a couple different purposes. The first purpose this serves is for the witnesses to tell the story of God claiming the baptized in that moment, over and over and OVER again, as often as necessary for the baptized to get it. When sin or life or whatever comes crashing down and doubt begins to creep in to the baptized person's life, the witnesses were there so that they can tell the person that God's promise is still good.

The second purpose behind their witnessing is that they can call the person to count when sin is all too prevalent in the person-in-question's life. They can then take up the disciples' call to repentance from Acts 2, "Repent" for you were already baptized. These witnesses whether they were formal sponsors or not,

have an in to call the baptized back into their baptismal repentance in those instances.

So you see, baptismal witnesses are there to tell the specific story of salvation to the person who is in the moment of baptism being born into it. And even cooler still, they can use that moment to recount God's salvation for us modern folk to other modern folk who maybe haven't heard about Jesus. For these reasons, the church encourages sponsors, and not only sponsors but Christian sponsors who will pray for and actively encourage the person who is baptized in their witnessing.

There's not really any, "What's in it for me?" in this kind of witnessing. There is not the glory of a court stand, or the fame of a key witness' convicting testimony. But, there is eternal glory waiting after all of the struggle and trials that you are promising to take on as this kind of witness. Because your responsibility is no less than any witness. You are there to bear witness to the truth of the matter at hand. That truth is that Jesus in that moment is taking another person into himself, that his death and resurrection might be that person's as well. In that moment, God is claiming another child as his own. So whether it is an infant or an adult, the witnesses are there to tell that person the story of God's salvation for them in that moment whenever the baptized might need reminding, just as the apostles reminded the people around them whenever there was occasion. So go. Be witnesses.

Pastor Carl P. Johnson

