Testimony is… Terrifying Memory Verse: Psalm 60:12

November 5th, 2023 Scripture Reading: Isaiah 11:1-6

**SLIDE: 1 Title**

 Today we begin a new series all about testimony! Now, if we stop and think about it, the last couple of series have been about testimony. Throughout the summer, we discussed the conversion stories of famous Christian leaders. We focused on the times in their life when they first met Jesus Christ and how it changed them. That’s a testimony. Then we looked at season 1 of the “The Chosen”, a miniseries based on the gospels which were written down as testimonies of what Jesus said and did. The gospel testify to who Jesus is, the Son of God, the Savior of the World. Now we continue to talk about testimonies, but in a different gear. This series for the next month is going to focus on you and me and the testimonies we have to tell. And we have already kicked it off with Darrell Benson who was willing to share his story with us. And as he shared about his life, if you listen really closely, you being to realize that his story is really not about him, it is really about God and what he is up to in Darrell’s life. That is the nature of testimony.

**SLIDE 2: testimony is…terrifying!**

 Today we are going to name the elephant in the room when we say testimony is…terrifying! It is nerve-wracking to imagine telling someone about my faith in God. It might be embarrassing to give credit to God in front of someone who doesn’t believe in him. It can be scary to come up in front of a large group and share…even in front of people you trust! When I was a kid, maybe sixth or seventh grade, my family and I took a little trip with some friends. They had kids the same age as my sister and I and for whatever reason, the fathers in the situation decided it would be fun to go cliff diving. I remember it being a beautiful, clear day, I remember hearing the shouts of others plummeting into water, I remember the strange thought of swimming with my shoes on, and yes, I remember the height. I could not tell you how high we were, but I know there were multiple perches from which you could jump. I was on the lowest. Now, I do not have a fear of heights, but most often, when faced with the reality of a high place, I am not also intending to jump off of that high place. This was a different proposition. My brave friend went right for it and flew off into the air almost without thinking. He eventually climbed back to our spot, dripping wet with a large grin on his face. “It’s great! You need try it!” And before I could object, he was midair again. Logically, I knew this jump wouldn’t kill me, I knew it would be fun (a long as I plugged my nose) and now I had the added testimony of my friend who had experienced something that excited him, animated him, engrossed him, and I had to try it.

 So I did. I jumped off the cliff, I fell for a while, I hit the water and came back up with a thrill I had never before known. I instantly wanted to do it again, and I knew that I would give those higher platforms a try as well. I wanted more of what I had just experienced.

Testimony is certainly terrifying. Talking about God is like peering over your feet only to find a height that seems unsurmountable. As you cautiously stand there, your brain begins to flood with all the reasons and excuses for not taking the plunge, for not speaking up, for not sharing what you know about the life of faith or the power of God. What if this person doesn’t care what have to say? Worse, what it they think less of me? What if my words come out wrong? What if the words come perfectly and I still sound like and idiot? What if…what if…

**SLIDE 3: What if…what if…**

The truth is, a lot of our reasoning is about saving face and avoiding embarrassment. Naturally, we want to maintain our friendship and besides, maybe someone else will come and talk to them about Jesus, hopefully. If I don’t jump, then I stay dry, I won’t ruin my shoes and things can remain as they are. The problem is, Jesus is not interested in letting things remain as they are. He wants us to take the plunge, to experience the depths of life.

 That experience comes at a risk. It is certainly not the safest or most comfortable thing to spend the afternoon jumping off of the side of cliffs. But, I want to let you know church, worshipping the one true God does not make for a safe or comfortable life either. =Worshipping the one true God is a terrifying proposition.

Turn with me to 2 Samuel chapter 6. READ 1-2

**SLIDE 4: 2 Samuel 6:1-2: Once again David assembled the select warriors of Israel, thirty thousand strong. David and all the troops who were with him set out for Baalah, which is Kiriath-jearim of Judah, to bring God’s chest up from there—the chest that is called by the name of the Lord of heavenly forces, who sits enthroned on the winged creatures.**

Now this chest was a box that was covered in gold and it is commonly called the Ark of the Covenant because it represents God’s promises that he has made to the Israelite people. But it is also know as the Ark of Testimony. It’s presence served as a witness and this in the very legal sense. The Ark contained the stone tablets of the 10 Commandments, the very word, or testimony of God. These words would bear witness to the lives and actions of the Israelites. Would they obey God’s word, or wouldn’t they? The words contained in the Ark would bear witness to the facts of the case. What could be more terrifying than to be accused in court only to have the Word of God testify against you. What possible defense would you have? On top of all that, the ark also carried with it the presence of God. It was the place God chose to dwell. As verse two says, God sits enthroned on this golden box, transported around by priests…this was God’s home on this earth.

**SLIDE 5: 2 Samuel 6: 3-5 They loaded God’s chest on a new cart and carried it from Abinadab’s house, which was on the hill. Uzzah and Ahio, Abinadab’s sons, were driving the new cart. Uzzah was beside God’s chest while Ahio was walking in front of it. Meanwhile, David and the entire house of Israel celebrated in the Lord’s presence with all their strength, with songs, zithers, harps, tambourines, rattles, and cymbals.**

 So things seem to be going pretty well. Priests are there kind of guiding the ark, musicians are there leading worship. It’s joy all around as the Philistines have been defeated and God’s presence, via this Ark of Testimony, is being restored to its rightful place. Hallelujah! But then the needle on the record skips.

**SLIDE 6: 2 Samuel 6: 6-11 When they approached Nacon’s threshing floor, Uzzah reached out to God’s chest and grabbed it because the oxen had stumbled.The Lord became angry at Uzzah, and God struck him there because of his mistake, and he died there next to God’s chest. Then David got angry because the Lord’s anger lashed out against Uzzah, and so that place is called Perez-uzzah today. David was frightened by the Lord that day. “How will I ever bring the Lord’s chest to me?” he asked. So David didn’t take the chest away with him to David’s City. Instead, he had it put in the house of Obed-edom, who was from Gath. The Lord’s chest stayed with Obed-edom’s household in Gath for three months, and the Lord blessed Obed-edom’s household and all that he had.**

 Uzzah, the son of a priest, a good man as far as we know, instantly killed. Why? He was being helpful and observant. He noticed the oxen stumble over a bump in the road so he moves to steady the ark, and…disaster. King David is afaid and angry and he decided to basically drop everything and leave the ark to sit in the yard of Obed Edom…an unworthy Phillistine, not even a member of God’s people.

 Why was Uzzah killed? He, touched the holy dwelling place of God. As good as Uzzah was, as priestly as he was, he was not holy enough to be touching the presence of God. When sin comes into contact with holiness, what happens? What must happen? Sin will be destroyed every time. Obliterated. If sin is allowed to co-exist with God, then God would no longer be holy. Think of sin like dirt on a brand new white shirt. Even a small amount of dirt keeps the whole shirt from being pristine. When it comes to worshipping a holy God, not a scintilla of dirt is acceptable, not if we want to be in his presence. That is why we need Jesus. Christ is our righteousness, our purity. He removes our sin, he is our defense, and through him we are able to freely come into the presence of a holy God. But Uzzah didn’t have Jesus yet and what happened to him should happen to us, so we thank God for Jesus!

 But let’s not pretend that there is anything safe about it. Look to the cross! See what it cost to make you and I acceptable. Don’t forget the horror and suffering Jesus endured so that we could live eternally! Jesus made it possible for us to be able to approach a holy God. As we sang today, Jesus Paid it All!

**SLIDE 8: Jesus Paid it All!**

 This story about Uzzah and the ark is a terrifying story. The story of Jesus and the cross is terrifying as well. Might our story of dying to ourselves so that Christ can live in us carry with it a sense of foreboding, a sense of dread? To die to oneself is not a very palatable proposition. It’s a little like jumping off a cliff.

 But keep in mind the consequences of these things. Keep in mind what happens after we take the plunge. What happened after I hit the water and my head came up for air?…I wanted more. So often, when we face the terrifying thing, we find new life on the other side. So often, that challenging experience, once we face it, unlocks a deeper part of us and we find another layer to our faith, a closer walk with God, a more obedient heart within us.

 I think back to the first time I ever played guitar in front of people. At the time this would have been in front of youth group kids. It was a nerve-wracking experience. It was awkward and scary, and yet unlocked a thrilling aspect of my walk with God. I might still be awkward to some, but from my perspective, I am just flying through the air, experiencing the thrill of worshipping a holy God that has made a way for me to come near. Recently, we had our neighbors over for a game night. They know we are Christians, but it is certainly easier and safer to lean away from that subject, lean away from that edge. Politics and religion should be left off the table right? But we were determined to be a bit bolder this time, so, over the course of the night, we falteringly invited them to come to church. This started a conversation about their past experiences with church and where they stood on matters of faith. It was probably a little awkward to watch, and they have not so far taken us up on our invitation, but my wife and I both have experienced a thrill that comes from being a little bit bold, a little bit willing.

 So I acknowledge, testimony is terrifying, but it is life giving. It is time for us to face our fears and do the hard things. Jesus did just that, the early Christians did that, persecuted Christians today do that, and we must be willing to do the same. Testimony is terrifying, but it is life-giving.

 I want to close with Psalm 60. Psalm 60 is a song of King David that he apparently wrote to a specific tune, but this song is described as a testimony, but it is a bit of a terrifying one. We are pretty good at singing the happy psalms, but there are quite a few that communicate lament or even doubts. This psalm is a cry for help. God’s people have been suffering hardship and meeting with defeat. Included are words spoken by God himself, and then a conclusion. So as we read, pay close attention to the words of this testimony of David.

**SLIDE 9-12 PSALM 60**

Listen to this testimony: “God, you have rejected us…you are angry…You have split the ground apart…You have made your people suffer…God, you no longer accompany us…” This is not the type of testimony we like to hear is it? We don’t much think about what life might be like when we set ourselves up against God. That situation ought to terrify us. God is not going to be on our side, we need to make sure we are on his. And let’s not lose the end of this psalm, “Human help is worthless, God will give us victory, it is He who will defend us and tread down our enemy.”

**SLIDE 13: God will give us victory**

This is the moment our head pops up from under the water, when we feel the relief, that rush of new life, if we experience victory, it is from the hand of God. He defends us. This is David’s testimony, this is Darrell’s testimony. This is the testimony of the word of God. Terrifying , but true. Terrifying, but life giving. May we be willing to jump off that place where God has set us, to take the plunge and find new life in the depths.

Amen.