

Offertory CD – Can I Get A Witness? by D.C. Talk

*I rap for Christ, no crossin' the line, I don't water down lyrics or forget the spine
I gotta come bold, cause I've been sold on the Word that'll never grow old
Ya see, I was raised in a Godly home and I was taught as a child who is on the throne
I learned to have faith and I learned to stand up for the Father, who is in command
Ya know, back in the day, I was taught to pray. Ya see, a livin' God would have it no other way
I wanna know who's down with what I say. Yo fellas, there's no time to play, so get busy
**Can I get a witness - Does anyone agree? Can I get a witness to stand for their belief?
Can I get a witness to carry on the torch? Bring honor to the Father, give glory to the Lord.**
Who's in the army, who's servin' the King? Callin' all brothers to the center ring
We're in one accord, we're servin' the Lord. Eternal life is our reward.
We gotta come together and build morale. Yo, what are ya waitin' for, the time is now
I gotta ask y'all, do I stand alone? I need a second motion on the microphone
Can I get a witness to what you've heard. I need a posse to give me da word (word!)
Jump on my back, let's kill the hype, boys. I need a witness for Jesus Christ
**Can I get a witness - Does anyone agree? Can I get a witness to stand for their belief?
Can I get a witness to carry on the torch? Bring honor to the Father, give glory to the Lord.**
(fade at 2:35)*

Doug: Hard to believe that song is already 20 years old! That was DC Talk from their album, *Nu Thang* in 1990. Remember that one, Dave?... This is my older brother Dave, everybody. Dave, that song goes back to our youth ministry days, doesn't it?... As most of you know, I was in youth ministry for 9 years before coming to Summit back in 1995. And Dave was in youth ministry for 23 years before accepting the call to serve as senior pastor at Arlington Countryside Church in Arlington Heights, Illinois in 2005.

We grew up in Joliet, Illinois, and were blessed to be raised in a Christian home, where our parents dressed us up nice and snazzy for Sunday School and church, complete with offering envelopes in hand! (see photos on screen) We also have a brother Gary who is 8 and 10 years older than us, a retired attorney who now lives in Orlando, Florida. So Gary was off to college by the time I was in third grade, but Dave and I shared a lot in common growing up, and I have always looked up to Dave. In fact, I received Christ as Savior a couple days after Dave did, because he dared me to! Can I get a witness?!

During high school, I followed in Dave's footsteps at the Christian Youth Center in Joliet, where God called both of us into ministry. We both attended Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, and Dave was my RA when I was a freshman! I graduated from college in 1984, and before entering seminary that fall, April and I were married, and Dave was kind enough to officiate at the wedding!

Like Dave, I followed the Lord into youth ministry, and now we are both serving the Lord and His church in the role of senior pastor. So it's a great honor for me to have Dave with us this weekend, as speaker at our men's retreat... And it's a privilege to share the pulpit with him today in some tag-team preaching, as we continue our series in the Gospel of Mark with a message we've entitled, *Can I get a witness?*

Dave: As we all know, that phrase is commonly used in black churches, when the preacher wants the congregation to talk back to him. He's asking for some affirmation, some support, somebody who agrees to shout Amen or something! And today's text is going to challenge us to consider what kind of witnesses we really are for Christ. The song said, *Can I get a witness - Does anyone agree? Can I get a*

witness to stand for their belief? Can I get a witness to carry on the torch? Bring honor to the Father, give glory to the Lord.

Doug: **Mark 14:53-72** is all about witnesses and testimonies, both true and false. It's all about declaring or denying your faith in Jesus. So this should be a great preparation for next Sunday as **Mark Cahill** comes to motivate and equip us to be bold witnesses for the Lord Jesus Christ. I'm very excited to have him come. Mark Cahill is a very popular author and conference speaker.

His morning message next week will be entitled, "*One Thing You Can't Do In Heaven.*" There are many things we *can* do in heaven, of course. We can worship God, serve God, learn more about God. *But*, Cahill writes, *one thing you can't do in heaven is share your faith with a non-believer. Why? Because everyone in heaven is a believer. Do you realize that when you take your last breath, you will never again be able to talk with a lost person? Since that is true, shouldn't it be a priority of your life to reach out to all the lost people on earth while you can?*

Cahill begins chapter 13 of this book by quoting **Psalm 89:37** - *Like the moon it shall be established forever, a faithful witness in the skies.* Interesting! When the psalmist needed an example of a faithful witness, he thought of the moon. Why is that, Dave?

Dave: Well think about it: Even though the moon cannot speak, every night the moon faithfully witnesses to the glory of God by reflecting the light of the sun! In the darkness of night, the sun is still made known on the earth through the witness of the moon. The moon testifies to the glory of the Creator.

And this should be a challenge for us. How can I let the moon be more of a witness for God than I am, since I have a voice to proclaim His name? As believers living in a dark world, we need to be more like the moon, using our lives and our voices to reflect the light of Jesus, God's only Son.

Doug: The world was never any darker than in **Mark 14**, as the Son of God is betrayed into the hands of sinners, armed with clubs and swords to seize Him and put Him to death. All of His followers abandon Him, and we pick up the story in **v 53** - *And they led Jesus to the high priest. And all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes came together. 54 And Peter had followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest. And he was sitting with the guards and warming himself at the fire.*

Dave: *55 Now the chief priests and the whole Council were seeking testimony against Jesus to put him to death, but they found none. 56 For many bore false witness against him, but their testimony did not agree. 57 And some stood up and bore false witness against him, saying, 58 "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.'" 59 Yet even about this their testimony did not agree. 60 And the high priest stood up in the midst and asked Jesus, "Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?" 61 But he remained silent and made no answer. Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" 62 And Jesus said, "I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven." 63 And the high priest tore his garments and said, "What further witnesses do we need? 64 You have heard his blasphemy. What is your decision?" And they all condemned him as deserving death. 65 And some began to spit on him and to cover his face and to strike him, saying to him, "Prophecy!" And the guards received him with blows.*

Doug: *66 And as Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came, 67 and seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, "You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus." 68 But he denied it, saying, "I neither know nor understand what you mean." And he went out into the gateway and the rooster crowed. 69 And the servant girl saw him and began again to say to the*

bystanders, “This man is one of them.” 70 But again he denied it. And after a little while the bystanders again said to Peter, “Certainly you are one of them, for you are a Galilean.” 71 But he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, “I do not know this man of whom you speak.” 72 And immediately the rooster crowed a second time. And Peter remembered how Jesus had said to him, “Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times.” And he broke down and wept.

Dave: It was a dark night in every sense of the word. But faithful witnesses were in short supply, weren't they? There were plenty of false witnesses ready to speak up in v 55-65. But through Jesus' own example, we see that being a faithful witness means we must **BE TRUE, NOT FALSE**.

Have you ever been falsely accused? ...story of my being accused of leaving my cafeteria tray on the table – it was Doug! – one day in the hole (in school suspension – the dregs of society – the burn-outs, druggies, gang bangers, trouble makers, the riff-raff – I was morally outraged / frustrated / such a sense of injustice!)

Can we begin to imagine what Christ must have been feeling in this situation?? He was the perfect, holy God incarnate!

This scene is the epitome of a kangaroo court:

- The Sanhedrin was like the Jewish first century version of our supreme court; (about 70 of them!) Caiaphas the high priest was president of this ruling council.
- Probably a lot of things were being done illegally: trial at night, a capital offense being tried during Passover, at the home of the high priest rather than council chambers adjoining the temple...
- They were not looking for the truth – they were looking for a reason to kill him (see verse 55)
- The false witnesses couldn't even keep their stories straight – not enough rehearsal –(thrown together quickly)
- The accusation that he threatened against the temple?? V.58 (A mere threat against the temple was punishable by death)
 - A likely reference to his words in John 2:19 – “*Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.*”
 - He never said he would destroy it! And he was referring to his own physical body – an allusion to his coming resurrection.
- Christ's silence was a fulfillment of :
 - “*He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.*” Isaiah 53:7

The tragic irony – The Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead, the righteous Judge is being judged by sinful men.

When Christ does break his silence – it is in response to the unwittingly accurate testimony from Caiaphas in verse 61 – structured more as a statement than a question...

The significance of Christ's words in verse 62 : **You are judging me but I will one day judge you...**and trust me – when I come as judge you will not be able to miss me, you will have no doubts about my identity – the stark differences between his first coming and his 2nd coming...

Christ remained steadfast, a faithful witness...how?

Of all the people to give us insight on this...it's Peter (the guy Doug is going to be talking about in a few minutes)

“When he hurled insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.” I Peter 2:23

- He believed that he would eventually be exonerated, that one day the truth would come to light – he believed his Father God was in control, that he would set things right, that holy justice would prevail, that he would have the last word, the true, final verdict.
- What a contrast between the two rocks –
 - Jesus, the rock of our salvation, was unmovable, unshakable - faithful witness to his Father.
 - Peter – the nickname given him by Jesus – Rocky – well, let's just say he wasn't quite living up to his nickname just yet... (Talk about that Doug.)

Doug: It's interesting that when Mark tells the story of Jesus' trial, with all those *unbelieving* false witnesses, he actually brackets that story with the account of a *believer* who also bears a false testimony.

In fact, it is through the failure of Jesus' most prominent disciple, Peter himself, the Rock, that we learn how a faithful witness must **BE BOLD, NOT FEARFUL** when given an opportunity to identify with Jesus Christ.

Dave reminded me last night that when I was a kid, I was also guilty of bearing false witness. You see, I've always been a big Cubs fan, and Ernie Banks was my hero growing up. But would you believe that when I was little, I went through a stage where I went around telling everyone that I was Ernie Banks' cousin? For some reason, I don't think I convinced many people! But I was not ashamed to identify with Ernie Banks. People didn't even have to ask me if I knew the man. I brought it up, and bragged that we were related. A false witness, but at least I was bold!

We gladly identify with people we admire, right? So how much do we really love the Savior if we never speak of Him? Is He really our Lord if we keep our relationship with Him a secret from others?

And yet if Peter could deny the Lord three times, any of us are surely capable of the same thing. Peter was a very interesting guy, wasn't he? He was born leader: a loud, extroverted, confident, assertive man who liked to be in charge, but often made mistakes.

In the gospels, Peter was always talking. No other disciple opened his mouth as often as Peter. Sometimes he's only opening his mouth to change feet, and other times his words are immortal. One minute he's confessing his faith in Christ and the next minute he's actually rebuking Jesus!

So I think it would be fair to say that Peter was a bold and talkative guy. Yet in this text, he's timid and speechless! How do we account for that? Just a few hours earlier, Jesus warned the disciples they would all fall away, and do you remember what Peter said to Him?

He bragged in **v 29-31** - *“Even though they all fall away, I will not.”* And Jesus said to him, *“Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times.”* But he said emphatically, *“If I must die with you, I will not deny you.”*

Then when the temple police show up in the garden to arrest Jesus, Peter draws his sword and plays Zorro, taking off the ear of one of the high priest's servants. He looks pretty tough there; very bold.

But his courage is short-lived, because when Jesus is seized, Peter flees the garden with the rest of the disciples. Now I guess we have to give Peter some credit though, because as the others scatter into the darkness, at least Peter tries to stay within eyesight of the Lord.

v 54 says he *followed him at a distance*. Have you ever tried that? Have you ever tried following Jesus at a distance? It's always tempting to play it safe. We're kind of interested in Christ, but we keep a comfortable gap between us and Jesus, to simply be a curious observer rather than a committed disciple.

We look for a faith that doesn't cost us anything. Many of us would rather avoid the risk of any kind of danger, loss, or rejection. Yet Jesus said the Son of Man came to suffer and be rejected and be killed.

And then He said, "*If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself* (who are we to deny? ourselves!) *and take up his cross and follow me*" (Mark 8:34). That does not sound like any way to attract a following! A cross is the ultimate image of rejection and scorn and humiliation. Who wants to take up a cross to follow Jesus? We'd rather follow at a safe enough distance to ensure that we will never be treated like He was treated.

But hear this carefully: if we will not deny *ourselves* to follow Christ, it's inevitable that we will deny *Christ* to protect or serve ourselves. And in the process, we will find ourselves in some awkward and compromising situations.

For Peter, it came by the fireside. It was a chilly spring night in Jerusalem, and he's just trying to keep warm. However, the light of the fire allows for his face to be visible and someone recognizes him, perhaps as the same guy who was earlier flashing the sword earlier. Anyway, despite Peter's desire to remain inconspicuous, he becomes the center of attention.

"*You also were with the Nazarene, Jesus,*" said one of the servant girls (v 67). And Peter stumbles over himself trying to deny the accusation: "*I neither know nor understand what you mean*" (v 68).

In the original language, the first word, "know," generally means theoretical head knowledge, like you know certain information. The second word "understand," generally means practical, experiential, relational knowledge, like you know a friend. So this is a total denial – in theory and in practice, he entirely disassociates himself from Jesus when the pressure is on.

And at the end of v 68 Peter leaves the fire and walks over to the gateway. Sometimes when we fail we think we just need to move on to another place. The problem is, wherever we go, we take ourselves with us! Wherever you go, there you are! And a change of scenery is no substitute for a change of heart. The change of locations only puts Peter even further from Jesus. \

And just like a guilty conscience, the servant girl accuses Peter a second time. But this time she enlists the bystanders for support of her claim, saying "*This man is one of them*" (v 69).

So now Peter must deny Christ before more people, not just one girl. This is only getting worse. So in v 70, *again he denied it*. The tense of that verb suggests that Peter didn't just deny it once, but repeatedly. He went off, saying things he probably never dreamed he would ever say. But as another gospel tells us, the more Peter talked, the more his accent gave him away, and the bystanders won't let it rest.

“*Certainly you are one of them, for you are a Galilean*” (v 70). And this leads Peter to his boldest and most terrible denial. *He began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, “I do not know this man of whom you speak”* (v 71). So here’s the chief apostle, unleashing a flurry of profanity, probably hoping that will make him less likely to appear to be a follower of Jesus.

Why did Peter cave in when the pressure was on? Why did his boldness evaporate when he had an opportunity to be a faithful witness? What could have caused him to deny Christ like this? For that matter, why do we all fail so frequently in our witness? Why are we not more bold?

Prov 29:25 says, *The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe*. And if we will look inside our own hearts I think we will see that we are no different than Peter. We fear man— their reactions, their opinions, their treatment of us. And our fear of man is evidence that we are not trusting God.

And at those moments, Christ is not really Lord of our lives. A substitute god has taken over, namely ourselves. We become idol worshipers, and the idol is self. Have you ever thought about it like that? Often, we are more self-centered than Christ-centered. We would rather deny Christ than deny ourselves.

And when we are hindered by fear, it shows a deeper issue, namely we are not submitting to Christ. We are not loving and trusting and serving Him as the one true God.

I think that’s why Peter later wrote, *Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy* (if we truly regard Christ as holy in our hearts, then we’ll have no fear when an opportunity comes along to witness), *always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect* (**1 Peter 3:14-16**).

Even though Peter failed on this night, at the end of v 72 he’s weeping. This is a godly sorrow, a sorrow of repentance, as Peter expresses remorse over his sin, over his cowardice.

And the Lord forgave him! Jesus didn’t give up on Peter or despise him for his failure. Aren’t you glad? After His resurrection, Jesus had a private meeting with Peter, by another fireside, and gave Him the opportunity to confess his faith three times, one for each time He earlier denied Christ.

And Peter would soon be a changed man, empowered by the Spirit, boldly proclaiming the message of Christ on the Day of Pentecost, and thousands would be saved through His witness!

A new day was dawning for Peter. After all, that’s what the rooster’s call is supposed to mean, isn’t it? A new day. A new beginning. Each one of us at one time or other will fail the Lord and then hear the crowing of the rooster. Satan will tell us that it means we’re finished, that our future has been destroyed.

But that is not God’s message to us. God is ready to give you a new start. We have a God who restores and renews and rebuilds!

When Jesus called Peter to follow Him, He promised to make him become a fisher of men (**Mark 1:17**). It’s a process; it’s something we *become* – we learn through experiences and failures.

In this dark world, God is still looking for faithful witnesses to His Son – those who speak the truth and do so with boldness. Perhaps like Peter, we should weep for our guilty silence, for our faithlessness. Maybe God is calling us to repent that we too have been living in the fear of man rather than regarding Christ the Lord as holy in our hearts. But there is grace for us in the sacrifice of Christ. So let’s bow before Him now and offer Him our undivided hearts.