

Called to Testify

Called to Testify – The First Christian Witnesses, by Kenneth Kremer
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Did you ever wonder what happened to the people mentioned in the New Testament whose lives were changed because of a personal encounter with Jesus Christ? For example, as a former member of the military, I can identify with the centurion who was in charge of the crucifixion detail on that first Good Friday. I often wonder what my thoughts and reactions would have been if I had been in charge of that detail in 33 A.D. I know what it is like to both give and follow orders. The person giving the orders expects them to be carried out to the letter and swiftly. At the same time, the person following the orders must execute them faithfully. As the old saying goes: “Yours is not to question why, but just to do or die”.

Of course, I like to think that I would have had the courage to contravene the orders at Golgotha since just Jesus’ demeanor, even as he was hanging from the cross, would have been counter to everything I had experienced in a similar situation and would have called His guilt into question. However, in truth I probably would have carried out the orders as stated since that is the way I would have been trained. In addition, the failure to carry out the orders would have meant the end of my military career. But what about the effect of that experience on the rest of my life? What testimony would I have presented in later years, for example to my children or grandchildren, about my experience and what I really thought about what happened?

Author (and editor of both Lutheran Parent magazine and of the popular God’s People series from Northwestern Publishing House) Kenn Kremer, explores these questions and many more in this imaginative and insightful look at nine (9) early Christian witnesses. That is not to say that these testimonies are related in a question and answer format similar to a cross examination in a courtroom. Rather, they are written in narrative format as if these early Christian witnesses were talking to some acquaintances in an informal way about the dramatic change in their lives after their encounter with Jesus.

Who are these “witnesses”? One of the shepherds in the field on the night of Christ’s birth; the bride at the wedding in Cana; the widow of Nain; the demon possessed Garasene; the Samaritan woman at the well; the adulteress woman; the cleansed leper; the thief on the cross; and the centurion at the execution. I think you will find something to relate to in all these testimonies.

These stories flesh out the character and thoughts of the witnesses and make the text even more compelling. At the same time, each of the stories remain faithful to the biblical accounts. And if these testimonies were not the actual testimonies of the witnesses (after all there is much speculation in all such efforts), perhaps they should have been. You will also find, as Kremer states, that the experiences of these earlier Christian witnesses are not so different from your own. To quote Kremer again: “Testimony is always shaped by a witness’ unique perspective. Personal experiences, attitudes, culture, and beliefs all play a role.”

We remember Peter’s admonition in his first epistle (chapter 3, verse 15): “But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.” These early Christian witnesses are excellent guides for all of us as we too are called to testify.

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