

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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How to witness

The story is related, in 2 Kings 6-7, of Israel's city of Samaria, besieged by the army of Syria. The problem was so serious in Samaria that food was exhausted and there was nothing left for the inhabitants. Outside the walled city were four lepers who were also starving. Their plight, if anything, was worse because, as lepers, they had no comforts within the city. Whatever action they took, they felt they would die so they determined, one day, to seek help from the besieging Syrian army. Much to their amazement, they found the camp totally deserted and were able to eat and drink as much as they wished. They then decided they would go to the gates of Samaria and tell those inside what they had found. This they did. We pass over the details and just note that disbelieving Samaria decided to test what they had heard and soon all were fully convinced that the Syrian army camp was empty.

Our subject today is "**how to witness**", and this story demonstrates witnessing with some particular points:

1. Lepers with limited expectancy of life, on visiting the army camp, found great satisfaction and the strength to go on with their life.
2. On going to Samaria, they were able to witness to what they had seen, tried and proved to be fully sufficient for their needs and which was also available to the Samaritans. It was good news!
3. They were thankful to see how so many others were also blessed by their action.

This is equally true for all who have received for themselves new life in the Lord Jesus Christ. Salvation has given the new beginning which is so arresting that others must be told the good news and with complete assurance of blessing to all.

This incident tells us very clearly what a witness is. Put simply for our purpose, a witness is one who can give an assurance, through personal knowledge, to the facts of a matter. These lepers had seen, had tried and proved for themselves before saying a word. When we look at the Acts 2:32 Peter, speaking on behalf of all the apostles, says, "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses". They were witnesses because they had seen the Lord Jesus alive. This triumphant event was worth witnessing to. Yet we can go further. In 1 John 5:10 the apostle tells his readers; "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself". So we are assured of the great fact of the work of the Lord Jesus in our lives. The Holy Spirit confirms it all to us and we also go forward to witness to the truth.

When we consider **how to witness**, as each one of us is different, with differing characteristics and abilities, we do not fit into a pattern wherein we all follow a strict list of rules. The lepers in our story simply witnessed to what they knew. There are many forms in which to witness but the principles will be the same. For our talk today we will seek guidelines from the Scriptures so that we will be better placed to follow them.

We come now to **The Message to witness**. We can imagine what an array of subjects the apostles, and many others, had when considering the three years they had spent with the Lord. What could they say of the many who were fed with bread and fish, or of the way Lazarus came out of his tomb and lived after he rose from the dead? They could have spoken of the scribes and Pharisees and their failure to stand to the truth of Moses' law, in the same way that Jesus did; or of their own favoured position in travelling with Jesus. Had they done so, they would have missed the message. In John 5:39 Jesus said, 'search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of ME'. Referring to the work of the Holy Spirit, the Lord said, "He shall testify of Me: and ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with Me from the beginning", John 15:26 and 27. Before He was taken back to heaven, the Lord told His disciples; "Ye shall be witnesses unto ME", Acts 1:8. Here is the first principle; whether we use the Scriptures or whatever we may say, we must witness to our knowledge of the Person of the Lord Himself and not just of His great works without referring to the Person. As Christians, with Jesus as Lord of our life, we learned that salvation was provided by the work of the Lord Jesus alone and it is vital that we always direct our testimony to Him.

Let us go further with some of these Scriptures. In witnessing of the Lord, the apostles avoided the history of His acts and linked the Person with His greatest work: His death and resurrection. Listen to Peter's first sermon: "Him, [Jesus], being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have *crucified and slain*: whom God hath *raised up*, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that He should be holden of it", Acts 2:23 and 24. In verse 32, "This Jesus hath God *raised up*, whereof we all are witnesses". The same evidence is pressed in 4:10; 5:30-32; 10:39-40. There is no doubt that the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus was central to the testimony given. The subject of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus dominated all the apostles had to say because this is the key to salvation.

Paul also brings the matter up in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4. He comments, "I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received...by which also ye are saved...Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures". Paul regarded this as vital truth. It leads men to salvation; it is the great power which brings others to the Lord. He points out in that chapter (verse 14) that without the resurrection our faith is in vain, that is, absolutely empty. So the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus are vital elements to all true witness.

Why not try, quietly, to sit and think of the Lord? Perhaps a picture will come into your mind of three crosses and that One on the centre cross, the raised voices, the words of the Centurion, "this man hath done nothing amiss". Then think on to the first day of the week. See the great stirring of the early hours, when the tomb was found empty, and through the day until the two returned from Emmaus with the story that they had seen the Lord. The disciples had already heard of this from Peter and then, the Lord Himself stood in their midst! Luke 24. These memory pictures are of One to whom we can add our witness. It is the Lord Himself who has saved us; we are convinced of His provision for the present and the future; we confirm the great biblical witness to the Lord first, to the Person of our Lord, Jesus Christ, and then to the work which has so affected millions of lives, His death and resurrection. Let us maintain this same witness.

The purpose of witness.

Surely witness would be wasted unless there is some purpose aimed at. The incident in John 9 gives us an admirable basis of the witness of the Lord Himself to a blind man. This man had never seen the light of the world! But the Lord Jesus came, made clay of the spittle and dust and anointed his eyes. As instructed the man went to the pool of Siloam "and washed, and came seeing", verse 7. This caused such consternation to the Pharisees and eventually they put the blind man out of the synagogue, effectively saying that they, and God, would have nothing more to do with that man. Have you noticed that, at each stage in the story, the man seems to be drawn nearer to understanding who Jesus was? Then Jesus met him again and asked him if he believed on the Son of God. Having heard from the Lord Jesus directly, he said, "Lord, I believe. And he worshipped Him", verse 38. Here is the point of witness. It is to bring others to believe in, and to worship, the Lord Jesus for themselves. Christian groups and churches should never be merely places of social gathering. They should be places where the Lord Jesus is the centre of belief and worship and where we rejoice with one another, with Him as our centre.

The power of witness

We can remind ourselves that every true believer is given the permanent presence of the Holy Spirit to help and encourage in this life. The Lord Jesus promised His disciples that when He left them, they would have another Comforter, "even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him: but ye know Him; for He dwelleth with you and shall be in you", John 14:17.

The Bible describes this power we have as fully dependent believers in our Lord Jesus through the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, as One who is always with us; another Comforter of the same kind as the Lord Himself, that is, of God. Let us then see how this affected the early apostles in Acts 2. First they were "filled with the Holy Ghost", verse 4, then Peter spoke to the company of people who crowded into Jerusalem, of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Then in verse 37 we see the effect: "They were pricked in their heart, and said...what shall we do"? The gospel witness that day went forth with power and great results. The witness was to the Person, the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus and many were saved that day.

Perhaps we wonder why it is that we do not see this same power at work today. Let us be assured that the power, which indwells the devoted believer in the Lord Jesus, is still there! There are, no doubt, many reasons but let us understand, too, that there is a god of this world who "hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them", 2 Corinthians 4:4. Satan is active today, perhaps as never before, filling our minds with material interests and turning men's minds from following God. May this never prevent the true witness from going forth to our Saviour, who has died and risen again, so that the Gospel is known!

Methods of Witness.

Let us first remember that our witness may be **Vocal**.

We have already referred to Acts 2. In Acts 11 we first have the discussion between the believers living in Jerusalem and the apostle Peter, concerning the spread of the Gospel to Gentiles. As they listened, these Jewish believers rejoiced that “God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life”, verse 18. What a tremendous change had taken place! But persecution continued and many believers had to leave Jerusalem for other parts. So a new work of the Holy Spirit was taking place and the Gospel was spreading far and wide.

Four different words are used for the vocal witness made by the believers.

From verse 19 we are told the story. Those who travelled to Phenice and Cyprus and Antioch preached the word. Who would have thought that in times of persecution God would use these means! The word in the King James Version translated as “preaching” would better read as “**speaking**”. It is descriptive of the methods used by the early Church in witness. This is the word for the simple speech of travelling people and we could just say they were gossiping the Gospel as they went. How wonderful that, when Spirit-filled believers are scattered, they scatter the truth of the word of God too!

In verse 20, some came to Antioch and “spake unto the Grecians (the Greeks), preaching the Lord Jesus”. This word “preaching” means announcing the good news, **evangelising**. This had not been done before but some of these men became evangelists to Gentiles. This is so vital still today!

Then, in verse 23 we have yet another word. We are told that, when Barnabas came, he “was glad and exhorted them”. Here is the servant of the Lord, **exhorting** new believers, that is, encouraging them and urging them to continue to follow the Lord Jesus and the new path of blessing.

The fourth word appears in verse 26. Barnabas searched for Paul and they joined together at Antioch and “taught”. Their effort here was to **teach** in a strictly orderly way to the Church, the truths concerning the Lord Jesus and His purpose for believers. What varied means of vocal witness were maintained and directed by the Holy Spirit! Everyone can have a part somewhere in this work.

A living witness.

Perhaps you find it difficult to speak. Then let us briefly look at Lazarus. This friend of Jesus died and the Lord brought him back to life, John 11. This blessing cheered Martha and Mary, and Lazarus was a centre of attraction after the Lord Himself. Note, he did not say one word which is recorded. With his new life, we see Lazarus sitting at table with the Lord, listening to every word. It is surely a good thing to spend time with the Lord. There were many visitors at this time, not only to see Jesus but to see Lazarus and we read, “the chief priests consulted that they might put Lazarus also to death because... many ...believed on Jesus”, 12:10 and 11. Why? The personal, silent, living witness of a child of God is often more valuable than many words. Paul, writing to the Corinthians, tells them, “Ye are our epistle...known and read of all men”, 2 Corinthians 3:2. Do others mark your life as a living witness for the Lord?

Witness is in action.

In 1 Thessalonians 1 the apostle Paul gives thanks for the believers there. He says, “ye became our imitators, and of the Lord...so that ye became models to all that believe in Macedonia and in Achaia: for the word of the Lord sounded out from you...in every place your faith which is towards God has gone abroad...” 1:6-8 (JN Darby translation). What a wide testimony to the power of the Lord Jesus to save was given by these people!

The Quality of witness.

One of the great failures in the Church of God in our day is the lack of love one for another. Love is active. Love never fails, Paul tells us, 1 Corinthians 13:8. The Lord gave this commandment to His disciples to love one another and continued, “By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another”, John 13:35. What a powerful witness to all around is the display of love, the love for one another, because we love God. This is shown in various ways too, for instance in the offer of hospitality, commended by the apostle Peter, 1 Peter 4:9, and also by Paul.

As we think over our witness for the Lord let the words Paul wrote to Timothy be true of us: “Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and has professed a good profession before many witnesses”, 1 Timothy 6:12. Max Lucardo wrote, in reference to Colossians 1:28 and 29, “Look at Paul’s aim, to present everyone perfect in Christ. Was it easier then than now? I don’t think so. Paul called it work. To this end I

labour, he wrote. Labour means work. Work means homes visited, people taught, classes prepared. What was his source of strength? He worked with all the energy the Lord so powerfully works in me. As Paul worked so did God. And as you work, so does the Father”.

May ours be a “good confession” in whatever way the Holy Spirit gives us opportunity.

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