

The Power of Your Testimony

Evangelism 101

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This evening, I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the gospel of John 9. As you're turning to John 9, Tracy and I had the privilege years ago of pastoring a little church in a small community in the middle of central Texas, and there was a very influential soul in that church who made a statement to me one day that I will never forget. He said, "Wherever the Lord takes you, whatever you do, however you serve, let me warn you of two temptations: taking the blood out of Jesus and hell out of the Bible." Well, tonight we have sung a whole lot about the blood of Jesus and we're about to talk about what happens if people don't come to know Jesus, the reality is according to scripture, it's the blood of Jesus that was shed for our soul and unfortunately it is hell that bears the consequence of one who does not repent and turn from their sins.

Tonight, if you're new with us, we're going to continue a study in evangelism. Evangelism simply is the sharing, the preaching, the proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ to a lost and dying world. And tonight, we're going to address a subject matter entitled the power of one's personal testimony. It has been said and attributed to numerous people, in fact, so numerous we don't who originally said it, that the most powerful evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the testimony of a transformed soul. With all of the proofs that we have from archaeology, with all the texts that we have in scripture, what we cannot deny is one who was wayward and lost all of a sudden who has been found on the right track.

In John 9, we have the story of a young man, although he's not technically that young, we have a young man who has been healed of his blindness. Blind since birth and there's an incredible theological discussion at the beginning of this of why he was and why he was not. By the time we get to verse 8, he has been healed. Jesus Christ has utilized the pool of Siloam to heal his eyes. Tonight, we're not reading the story for the sake of his healing, though it was real, we're reading the story for the sake of the testimony that he bore to those around and I want you to hear the common thread that he says.

Verse 8,

8 The neighbours therefore, and they which before had seen him that he was blind, said, Is not this he that sat and begged? 9 Some said, This is he: others said, He is like him: but he said, I am he. 10 Therefore said they

unto him, How were thine eyes opened? 11 He answered and said, A man that is called Jesus made clay, and anointed mine eyes, and said unto me, Go to the pool of Siloam, and wash: and I went and washed, and I received sight. 12 Then said they unto him, Where is he? He said, I know not. 13 They brought to the Pharisees him that aforetime was blind. 14 And it was the sabbath day when Jesus made the clay, and opened his eyes. 15 Then again the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. He said unto them, He put clay upon mine eyes, and I washed, and do see.

The rest of this passage deals not only with the debate surrounding his healing but even his parents come into the mix. They question his parents and they were fearful of being thrown out of the synagogue. They said, "He is of age. Ask him." Verse 24,

24 Then again called they the man that was blind, and said unto him, Give God the praise: we know that this man is a sinner. 25 He answered and said, Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see. 26 Then said they to him again, What did he to thee? how opened he thine eyes? 27 He answered them, I have told you already, and ye did not hear: wherefore would ye hear it again? will ye also be his disciples?

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, tonight as we study not only the truth of the testimony of this young man but a plethora of your word from beginning to end, may we realize what you desire to do in our life and once you've done that in our life, the impact it can have on others. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

Tonight as we study the power of one's testimony, the power of your story utilized to tell his story, I want to utilize just certain aspects of that and I want to begin with an area that may seem like it's off-topic but it's actually right in the center of it, the issue or the question of what we call the assurance of salvation. Now I joke all the time that if you get two Baptists together, you're going to get three different opinions, but there is probably no more debated issue within the context of the family of faith than this issue. In fact, many of you are aware that several years ago, I had the opportunity to publish a book in regards to all the questions that get asked to me not just on Wednesday nights but in other forms and for over 25 years whether it was at youth camps during the summer, or Wednesday nights here at First Baptist, Opelika, I have the privilege of addressing questions that people have regarding what scripture says about a variety of issues. When I say above all, I don't mean just 2:1, I mean probably 3-4:1 the number 1 question that has been asked of me throughout the years, in fact, so much so that every other question pales in comparison is the issue of one's what we call the security of the believer or assurance of salvation. Why is it that this issue would consistently rise up? I think it has everything to do with evangelism. You are less likely to share your faith with somebody else if you

are not confident in the faith that you possess. If you are not secure in your faith, then you're very unlikely to communicate that faith with anybody else.

Now let's talk about biblical passages versus biblical words. You know, the Bible is called sharper than any two-edged sword and one of the things that I've noticed about the Bible is people have a propensity to cherry-pick passages. We like to go in and take this phrase out or that phrase out, or we only tell half of this story and just a little bit of that story. Let me share with you, and this may seem somewhat counterproductive, any erroneous biblical doctrine you want to teach you can teach from the Bible; you just have to find a phrase or a statement to advocate and pull it out of context. That being said, I know that on all sides of the issue in regards to assurance of salvation, every position has their phrases, every position has their passages that they love to allude to and extrapolate. But let's just talk about some biblical words tonight. We've heard these not only in song but we see them in scripture: the word "saved." When we say that somebody is saved, it means they're in a perilous condition that they've been removed out of. When somebody is declared to be born again, that statement comes from John 3 when Jesus is speaking to Nicodemus. If one is born again, it is because their first birth is not adequate and they need a second opportunity. When one is redeemed, redeemed means that they were in a perilous state. One of the best illustrations in scripture is the wife of Hosea, Gomer, in the Old Testament story, that in order to be redeemed a price must be paid to be removed out of bondage and be brought into freedom. Obviously 1 Corinthians 6 says we have been bought with a price, the price of the blood of Jesus Christ. And to be reconciled. Reconciled is to take two things that are at odds and contrary to each other and have them come to a commonality. God is absolutely completely holy, humanity is completely depraved. It is the message of salvation that reconciles unholy man to a holy God.

Now that is a very simplistic, shall we say, spattering of words but why is that important? Because all of those words are the words the Bible uses to describe somebody who is a believer in Jesus Christ. There is no reference anywhere in your Bible where anybody becomes unsaved. There's no reference where they become unborn again, unredeemed, or unreconciled. There are a lot of places where the redeemed struggle, the reconciled are tempted, and the saved go wayward, but there is no biblical evidence that that status of being saved, that relationship of being born again is somehow voided out or dismissed because of one's behavior. Why is this critical? Because if the devil can get you to doubt your salvation, then you're most likely never going to share it with anybody else.

So what we know as the assurance of salvation is critical to our sharing our story of his story in our lives. So let's talk about sharing our testimony. When we talk about sharing one's story, there are a lot of biblical examples of people sharing their story. In John 9, the young man who was healed of his blindness whether it be his neighbors, whether it be the religious leaders of his community, whether it be his own family, there was a consistent message, "I don't know exactly how he did it, all I know is that I used to be blind and Jesus healed me."

In John 4, famous story of the woman at the well. We typically look at that story from the aspect of here was this woman with a sordid past, Jesus promised, "I will give you water

that will never run dry," talking about that we must worship not just in a physical location but in spirit and in truth. But I've noticed oftentimes when it comes to that incredible story in scripture, rarely do we get to the second half of the story. You know that that young lady goes into a neighboring town, Jesus stays, and she comes back, and in verse 29 of that story, she rounds up all the men in the community which, by the way, is somewhat humorous if you've read the first part of her story, and she says, "Come see a man who told me everything about myself." Her testimony, "This man, Jesus Christ, has changed my life."

In Acts 22 and in Acts 26, we have two of the accounts of the Apostle Paul recounting his testimony. Now let me draw a very distinct line here. In John 4 and in John 9, Jesus was on the way to the cross. In Acts 22 and 26, Jesus has already risen from the dead. Why is that critical? Because the Apostle Paul's testimony that he recounts every single time is, "I was headed to Damascus. I saw a light, heard a voice. Jesus spoke to me, I repented." Every single time. And there's occasions he tells the story just a little bit differently and he varies kind of the context therein but he never changes the basic story that he was headed the wrong way, met Jesus, and it has changed him for all of eternity.

So when we talk about the guidelines, if we're going to talk about sharing our testimony, telling our story, there are really only two aspects. Oftentimes we call it BC and AC, before Christ, and after Christ. Who were you before you were saved and who are you now that you are saved? Now I don't know the testimony or the story of each and every one of you but I do know that when it comes to sharing one's testimony we oftentimes feel that our stories don't compare and/or match others. I think we would all confess that it is those dramatic stories that so get our attention. The story of Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus with the goal of persecuting Christians, meeting Jesus and now being a missionary for Jesus. I mean, that is a dramatic story. We are drawn to the celebrities, the athletes, the whomever they may be, who lived sordid lives of debauchery and despair and to hear the story that maybe through a Bible in a nightstand in a hotel room, or maybe some type of message across a breakfast table, that they come to know Jesus Christ as their Savior.

But I think sometimes we forget that BC has no levels, and what I mean by that is this: lost is lost and saved is saved. In other words, just because one grows up in a pretty good home, just because an individual has what we might call church as a part of their lifestyle does not make them any less needful for salvation than the hardened criminal, and I think sometimes we forget because a lot of us, I'll use myself, grew up in what we might call a pretty decent Judeo-Christian ethic home and community where, yes, we did things we shouldn't have done but we weren't debauchorous by definition, we weren't as many of these stories, and we surely don't compare to some of the testimonies that we get highlighted, but therein lies the importance of the BC, because even if you're in a "Christian home, going to church on a regular basis," you're just as lost as Saul of Tarsus was. And I think sometimes we forget when we share our story that even if we weren't converted in prison, even if we were not taken out of a lifestyle of addiction, we were still lost and according to scripture headed to hell.

But then there's after Christ. What happened once we were saved? What happened once we were born again? Well, theologically and biblically the Holy Spirit comes and lives inside of us and we now have the capacity to do according to John 16, to live and to make decisions that are actually based on righteousness that we couldn't do before. There might have been times where we were moral. There might have been times where we were "headed the right path," but obviously with the wrong intentions.

And so our guideline for our story is all of us have two stories, we have the story of our life before Christ no matter what that may or may not sound like, it's still one of lostness, and then we have the story of after Christ, what is it that Jesus Christ has done in our life post that salvation experience. And so when we talk about sharing our story, it's a very simple guideline so let's get into the weeds just a little bit. For the sake of argument, you're going to share your story with somebody else. It doesn't matter the environment or the setting, there are certain aspects of your character that will enhance your testimony and/or prevent you from presenting a testimony that is egregious and I want to walk through some of those aspects tonight.

The first one is this: integrity. Now that's a word we like to throw around in our culture but in Acts 20:18, the Apostle Paul makes this statement, "From the first day that I came unto you." Basically what he was saying is that his disposition, his mannerisms, the way he behaved was no different the days leading up to him sharing his story than the day that he shared his story. I don't know how many different ways I can communicate this but what we do, how we live, and what we say on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday through Saturday may be more important to our testimony than the life we live on Sunday morning.

From the first day I came unto you there was integrity, there was also humility. The next verse he says, "We have served the Lord with all humility of mind." One's testimony should not possess any hint of arrogance or narcissism. Why? Because you didn't do anything to deserve and/or to do to get saved. In fact, when you share your story, if you share it biblically, it's that you were a vile, filthy sinner that couldn't save yourself, and if it were not for the mercy, the love, and the grace of Jesus, you'd be headed to hell. That is a very humbling fact.

And then passion. You know, that's a word, I know this sounds contradictory that I'm passionate about. I think we ought to possess passion, in fact, there in Acts 20:19, he says, "that I have come from the first day, I have served with humility and even with tears." He was passionate about the life he lived for Christ. He was passionate about those that were lost.

How about purity? Later in this story when the Apostle Paul shares his testimony, he basically says, "There's nothing that you can hold against me. There is nothing that has been egregious. There's nothing that can somehow be claimed contrary to the gospel. Though I am not perfect, I have done everything I know to set an example rightfully so for you." Why is this important? Because we live in a world that expects the bait-and-

switch, do we not? We live in a world that says, "I know what you're saying but... Oh, I hear that but what are you hiding from me?"

The Apostle Paul had integrity, it was a daily life. He had humility, it wasn't about him, it was about Jesus. He had passion, he shed tears over these people. And he had purity, that it wasn't a case where they could say, "Well, what about this?" And he lived a life of conviction. What does it mean to live a life of conviction? It means, contrary to what our popular world would advocate, you live by principle and not by feeling. I've heard people say, "I just don't feel like I'm lost." Well, guess what, you're still lost. I've even heard people say, "I don't feel saved." Well, that doesn't change the fact of whether you are or you're not. We live in an entire world today that doesn't feel like they're lost or need Jesus but the principle is apart from Jesus Christ everyone in the whole world is lost. We need the conviction to listen to God and not to opinions.

Now I know that flies contrary to our contemporary culture today but I think all of us have had somebody in our life, I've had an old baseball coach in my life that used to say, "Opinions are like armpits, we've all got them and they all stink." We need to be willing to sacrifice and not just live a life of comfort. One thing I've noticed when it comes to evangelism, sharing our faith, one thing I've noticed when it comes to sharing one's story is that it rarely happens at a time that is convenient. When you only have five minutes, there's a person who needs 15, and when you have something else that you have planned, it typically arises. You see the Apostle Paul every single time he shared his story, willing to sacrifice his time, willing to sacrifice his pride. You know, he kept going back to the Damascus Road. He kept going back to the person that he used to be to sacrifice his pride. Nowhere do you see the Apostle Paul say, "Well, now that you want to hear my story, let me share from the perspective of an apostle." He never said it. He always went back to the road to Damascus.

And consider the long-term consequences. You know, we have become a society today that's all about the immediate gratification, it's all about the here and the now, and the long-term consequences are this: that apart from Jesus Christ no matter whom one is, they spend eternity in a place the Bible calls hell. Only in Jesus Christ does one have access to what the Bible calls heaven. Those are some pretty long-term consequences.

Now let's talk about some priorities. When one is sharing their faith, when one is telling somebody else, "This is who I used to be before I got saved. This is who I am now that I am saved." The first priority needs to be your attitude and I don't mean passion and cheerful, I mean, your attitude to address the "why." You know, we have become a culture today that is defaulted to the "what." This is what we expect. This is what you should do. This is what we expect of you. We have become a "what" culture but humanity naturally are "why" people, and what I mean by that is it doesn't matter what you tell me I need to do, I want to know why I need to do it. And yet what are we told by the voices that are the loudest? Just do what we tell you. Don't argue, just do what we tell you. You know, those who are pushing against the grain of our culture are the ones saying, "Well, why should I?"

What's the "why" here? Well, when we speak about our testimony, when we speak about telling our story, we must have an attitude of addressing the "why." Why is it that one needs to believe on Jesus Christ? Why is it that Jesus Christ needs go to the cross in the first place? Why is the resurrection important? And why would I spend time telling you my story? And the "why" is simply this: because of sin. That's the "why." Why would we bother telling our story? Why would we bother preaching the truth? Why would we bother communicating what Jesus Christ has done on behalf of humanity if it were not for our sin problem? The "why" behind it all is that humanity has rebelled against God, humanity has a sin problem that only Jesus Christ can fix.

Then there's consistency, addressing the "how." Now when I speak of addressing the "how," I put a little asterisk there for a reason. Some of you may or may not be familiar with what I've titled my line theology and let me display or describe to you what I mean by line theology. I want you to imagine a board or a writing instrument of some kind that is blank. In your mind, I want you to draw a line down the middle and on one side of the line I want you to put "Lost," and on the other side I want you to put "Saved." And the question is this: how does somebody, anybody go from one side to the other? How does somebody go from being lost to found? How do they go from being lost to saved? How do they go from being hell-bound to heaven-bound? How does that happen?

Now it would seem in a context such as this that I'm being overly simplistic but can I go back to the story the Apostle Paul shared time and time again? He kept saying, "I met Jesus and repented. I met Jesus and repented. I met Jesus and repented." One of the struggles of humanity, and if you allow me to say, one of the big struggles of organized religion is we like to come up with all kinds of ways to get across that line other than Jesus, do we not? And the consistency is it comes back to Jesus. I don't know how many times I have "shared the gospel" with somebody and in the process of sharing the gospel say, "Well, what about church attendance? Do I have to be there every week? Well, what about giving? Does it have to be 10%? Well, what about..." Don't worry about the "what" until you get the "how." How do you get across the line? We'll worry about those things later.

You see, the priority is the "why," we have a sin problem. The consistency is the "how," and I think one of the things that oftentimes we struggle with our testimony is we communicate sanctification rather than salvation, and what I mean by is a lifestyle of holiness or an expectation of holiness. You cannot expect somebody to be holy until they're saved. That's why Jesus said that we are fishers of men. You cannot clean the fish until you catch the fish. And so matters of cleanliness are indifferent until one has been caught.

So in conclusion tonight, there are certain disciplines that need to be a part of your life that impact your testimony as related to evangelism. Now in Luke 9:23, it says, "If any man come after me, let him take up his cross and follow me daily." I want to deal with just five very simple spiritual disciplines that will naturally impact not just your propensity but your effectiveness in sharing your story of before Christ and after Christ.

The first, and I know you expect this of me, is Bible study. John 8:31-32 it says, "If you continue in my word, you'll be my disciples. You shall know the truth and the truth will set you free." If we've ever needed agents of truth, it is in today's world and that comes out of a life of Bible study. If we do not spend time in scripture, do not expect us ever to share our story with anybody else.

Second would be what the Bible refers to as fasting and praying. Now I know fasting may not sound Baptist but it's biblical, folks. Fasting and prayer in John 15:7, "Ask what you will and it shall be given unto you." Rarely, if ever, is our sharing of the gospel, our testifying of the goodness and grace of Jesus Christ come as a part of a prayerless life.

Next, this word may not sound what we might consider normal for this study but what we might call meditation and solitude. I'm not talking about sitting on a hill with your legs crossed humming. That's not what I'm talking about. The Bible says in Psalm 1, "Blessed is the man who meditates on the word of God." Spending time just thinking of the things of God, the characteristics of God through the word of God in solitude. Now this may not mean much for you but it does for me. I am not a person who enjoys solitude. I like people. I like to be around people. I like to be active. It is almost physically painful for me to be by myself. You do know I was raised an only child. I had a painful childhood. So that being said, in Mark 1 at the very beginning of his ministry, it says Jesus departed into a solitary place. We have to spend alone time with the Lord to get all the voices that are always consistently surrounding us to be silenced.

Now think about just those three. Those are very personal, are they not? They're very private. Yes, you can do Bible study as part of a corporate body but it's speaking about one's own walking or journeying through scripture. Fasting and prayer, sure, we have prayer groups but typically we don't fast corporately. It's a private thing. And then meditation and solitude with the scriptures and with the Lord, that is a personal private discipline. It's the next two disciplines that tend to be a little more public. The discipline of service or the opportunity to serve. In John 13:34-35, "A new commandment I give unto you that you love one another." That of serving, that of giving of your time, your energy, your resources to better somebody else, to be willing to allow yourself to be inconvenienced for the sake of they needing to see the testimony of the gospel.

And finally that word. Yes, it's our study, yes, it's that which we've been doing for some weeks now: evangelism. In John 15:8, the Lord says that it's his desire that we bear much fruit. Now I want to focus tonight on a word we probably don't focus much on on that statement, "much." Not that we bear some, not that we bear little, but that we bear much. Remember the parable of the sower? It's mentioned in a variety of places in the New Testament but particularly in the gospel of Mark it says that there's a man that goes out to sow the seed. Remember the interpretation? The seed is the word of God and it can fall upon four different types of ground. One ground it falls upon, it's very hard and such. It doesn't even get to the ground because the birds of the air come and take it away. It says that the second seed, though it falls on somewhat of a hard ground, it springs up quickly but then it withers away because it had no seed. There is a third one that, for all intents and purposes, is bearing fruit but it becomes unfruitful because of the deceivableness of

riches, the cares of this world, and the desires for other things. And then there's that fourth one, that example that Jesus Christ set forth, that one that bears much fruit. It says some 30, some 60, some 100 fold. Now that's a lot of fruit when you can take one seed of one item and produce 30 of that which it came from, 60 of that which it came from, 100 by that which it came from.

Allow me to close tonight by going full circle back to the story that we read earlier in John 9. It's an incredible story of a young man from his birth that was blind that was healed by the simple touch of Jesus Christ, but have you ever considered the "much fruit" that was borne? Let me take you back to verse 8 of John 9, it says, "And the neighbors therefore." Now again, I wasn't an English major but when you put an "s" on that word, it makes it plural. That means there was more than one neighbor, was there not? And if I know humanity and our propensity for communication and, shall we say, gossip, I bet it was half the town that was there. The neighbors that were gathered. Go to verse 15, "Then again the Pharisees," with an "s" on the end. Not just one of them but multiple.

You see, the testimony of this young man, "I used to be blind, now I can see," it impacted those that lived in his neighborhood, it impacted his own parents, it impacted those that were in authority, it impacted those who had the ability to be movers and shakers in the community, and yet what did he do? He simply stated, "I used to be blind and now I can see." You see, when it comes to our testimony, typically we think, "Well, my story is not that big a deal. I mean, I used to be lost and now I'm found." It's kind of the story and that was kind of his story too, and I think one of the worst things we can do is undermine the potential of what God desires to do with our story. Our story may be exactly what somebody else needs to hear. It is our story that may be the instrument that the Lord uses to reach somebody else with the gospel, because one thing I've learned is oftentimes my story is actually somebody else's story, and when they hear what Jesus Christ has done in my life, then they realize their need for him in their life. With all the evidence and with all the means of communication, let us not dismiss the power of the testimony of a changed life.