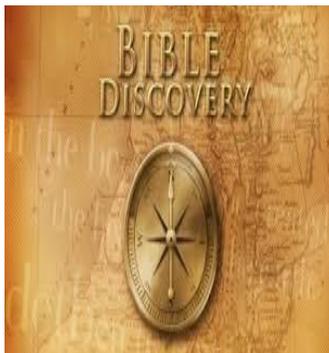


We are His Witnesses



Many times when we entertain scriptures such as here in Matthew chapter 4 where Jesus calls his first disciples which speak of a “calling”, we think of what it is to be called. I’ve heard messages speak to what we’re called to, and called from. Both raise interesting and important facets of the Christian disciple’s calling. But there’s another part to the equation – when we are called, what are we called to be? Are we to be “good”, never again to experience sin? Are we to be “neighbourly” or what? I believe that first and foremost, and I say this somewhat carefully due to the crisis in the world today, we’re called to be contagious! You may know the chorus “*It only takes a spark to get the fire going...*” Now before you all start searching for your immunization card, let me explain.

Christians often talk of “witnessing” for Christ. But Jesus’ command to believers is to “be witnesses”. Our failure to “be witnesses” may help explain the lack of success of many of our efforts. Christians who approach a total stranger and open the conversation with something like: “*Hello, can I ask you if you know Jesus as your personal Saviour*” while certainly commendable, rarely see it work. Why? They’ve no credibility with that stranger. They haven’t yet earned a hearing with them. There’s no established trust factor. There’s no relationship.

As the church we’ve been called to proclaim, to be a sign of God’s kingdom. Christ has commissioned us to be the church - to be his witnesses - making disciples of all nations, baptizing them, and teaching them to observe all things he has commanded. But I don’t believe we’ve been called to mimic the cold sales call of the world’s sales barkers. We have to make it personal. We’re called to let our life be the story which tells the world we belong to Christ. We share with others by letting the story – my story; your story – be the witness; the way we live needs to show that Christ is real.

The church is called to witness to the reign of Christ by embodying Jesus’ way in our own life, patterning ourselves after Him. A witness is a person whose duty is to help others discover truth by making a true statement about what he has seen and/or heard. We’re called to show the world a sample of life under the lordship of Christ, to confidently testify to the fact that Jesus is Lord. By our life, we’re to be the city on a hill, a light to the nations, testifying to the power of the resurrection by a way of life different from the societies around us. That doesn’t mean we’ll live perfect religious lives; it means we’ll have a refreshing transparency that shows we’re loved and forgiven by our Father.

Jesus didn’t fit the pattern of what people expected a holy man to be like. Luke reported: “*By this time a lot of men and women of doubtful reputation were hanging around Jesus, listening intently*” [Luke 15:1]. The religion scholars of His day were not pleased and growled “*He takes in sinners & eats meals with them, treating them like old friends*” [Luke 15:2]. Just as we are, Jesus has also called us to be witnesses to His name drawing men and women and children from all walks of life, regardless of circumstance to the Father. The reason why we are called is because He wants us to display His glory among all nations through our testimony.

Statistically there are times when people are more open to hearing your testimony. Interestingly the Christmas season is the top period for inviting friends and family to hear about Jesus, invite them to church, and invite them to receive Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. Using a survey from markmarshallsblog.blogspot.com for American adults, the top 5 times when they are more open to consider matters of faith are:

- During the Christmas holiday season - 47%
- During the Easter holiday season - 38%
- After a major national crisis such as 9/11 - 38%
- After a natural disaster – 34%
- After the birth of a baby – 28%

**We’re called to
let our life be the
story which tells
the world we
belong to Christ.**

In addition to giving witness to Jesus in word, we're to witness by proclaiming Christ in deed. Several years ago a preacher moved to Houston, Texas. Some weeks after he arrived, he had occasion to ride the bus from his home to the downtown area. When he sat down, he discovered that the driver had accidentally given him a quarter too much change. As he considered what to do, he thought to himself, you better give the quarter back. It would be wrong to keep it. Then he thought, "Oh, forget it, it's only a quarter. Who would worry about this little amount? Anyway, the bus company already gets too much fare; they will never miss it. Accept it as a gift from God and keep quiet." When his stop came, he paused momentarily at the door, and then he handed the quarter to the driver and said, "Here, you gave me too much change." The driver with a smile, replied, "Aren't you the new preacher in town? I have been thinking lately about going to worship somewhere. I just wanted to see what you would do if I gave you too much change." When the preacher stepped off the bus, he literally grabbed the nearest light pole, and held on, and said, "O God, I almost sold your Son for a quarter."

We cannot do anything to win other to Christ unless first we bear witness to Christ in how we live and we live up to what we profess.

We're called to seek the lost, call for repentance, announce salvation from sin, proclaim the gospel of peace, set free the oppressed, pray for righteousness and justice, serve as Jesus did, and without coercion urge all people to become part of the people of God. But we cannot do any of this unless first we bear witness to Christ in how we live and we live up to what we profess. Yet there's an immense gravitational pull toward the natural that seems to overwhelm all life forms of which we're an integral part. Doing wrong and walking according to the flesh seems to occur naturally, while walking in the Spirit seems to require great effort and resolve. If we will be who we wish to be, if we would be children of God, if we would be disciples who go and tell, if we would be His witnesses, we need to receive "*power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*" [Acts 1:8] The Apostle Paul explains how this power of God works through us at 2 Corinthians 4:7, "We now have this light shining in our hearts. *This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves*"

Within the power of the Holy Spirit, even at the risk of suffering and death, the love of Christ compels us as faithful witnesses to testify for our Lord. Such witness is a response to Jesus' call to follow Him as fishers of men. It's our response to leave the nets of our old life and follow Him to make disciples. As we welcome others, building relationships and caring for those who come our way, new Christians choose to participate with us in worship, in fellowship, education, mutual aid, service, and continuing mission. New believers also help us as the church learn new dimensions of mission. Along with the Apostle Paul, "*the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives...we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel.*" [1 Thessalonians 2:3-4]

Christ commissioned us as the church to continue His mission. Those with the gift of evangelism don't function independently, but as representatives of Christ and His body. The commissions by Jesus to His disciples such as Acts 1:8 which we just heard and Matthew 28:19-20, "*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*" At Luke 24 we're told, "*he (Jesus) opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures*" in order that they would be His witnesses preaching repentance and forgiveness for sins.

As witnesses our mission involves word and deed, evangelism and service, proclaiming Christ's message and demonstrating, by the life of the church, the nature of the new creation in Christ. Neither word alone nor deed alone is sufficient for mission. Word explains deed, and deed authenticates word. We're called to live as an alternative to the culture within which we reside. As the church we live within the dominant culture, while called to challenge that culture's myths and assumptions when they conflict with Christian faith. Those cultural myths include individualism, materialism, militarism, nationalism, racism, sexism, and a worldview which denies the reality of anything beyond the grasp of the five senses and reason. When our testimony is rejected, we must hold to the fact they don't reject us, they reject Jesus. "*Satan, who is the god of this world, has blinded the minds of those who don't believe. They are unable to see the glorious light of the Good News*" [2 Corinthians 4:4]. For this reason, Paul was driven by the Spirit to tell others about Christ and so must we. In these last days

as we wait for the return of our Lord, we must hunger for our loved ones to hear and receive the Good News, we must put aside our fears – the worries about our reputation – and be ready to give God’s Word at every opportunity which comes from God above.

Our joy must be to press on - to be witnesses of Jesus Christ as the only Saviour of the world as we read, “*Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved*” [Acts 4:12]. Some people feel all ways to God are equally valid, that mission work by its very nature is intolerant and coercive. However, faithful witness to Christ is non-coercive; it does not *force* our point of view on anyone. It recognizes God is not left without a witness anywhere. It testifies to Christ's work in our lives and invites others to know Him, follow Him, and become part of his body. Just as the early church's mission to the Gentiles helped it understand the gospel in new ways we are His witnesses to go and share our lives with others around us. Let me wrap up with a quote from Erica Stetz, a World Vision program management specialist, as she explains, “We look to Christ, the One who redeems the world and reconciles people to Himself, for strength and guidance in our work. We seek to personify Christ’s example by being the active, visible expression of God’s love to those we serve, to those who support our work, and to each other.” How we live our lives before others can help them see Him for the first time.

**Our joy must be
to press on - to
be witnesses of
Jesus Christ!**

If you would like to know more about our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ who loves you and truly cares for you, I invite you to contact us at 1-519-317-8659 or via email at office.mbbc@xplornet.com.

May the Lord richly bless you with his presence...

Blessings,

Pastor Dave