

Sharing *the* Story of Jesus



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Eph. 2:1–10, 1 John 4:7–11, Mark 5:1–20, Heb. 10:19–22, Gal. 2:20, 1 Cor. 1:30.*

Memory Text: “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God” (*1 John 5:13, NKJV*).

As stated in an earlier lesson, nothing argues more eloquently for the power of the gospel than a changed life. People may argue with your theology. They may debate about doctrines. They may call into question your understanding of the Scriptures, but they will rarely question your personal testimony of what Jesus means to you and has done in your life.

Witnessing is sharing what we know about Jesus. It is letting others know what He means to us and what He has done for us. If our witness consists solely of trying to prove that what we believe is right and that what others believe is wrong, we will meet with strong opposition. If our witness about Jesus comes from a heart that has been transformed by His grace, charmed by His love, and amazed at His truth, others will be impressed with how the truth we believe has impacted our lives. Truth presented in the context of a changed life makes all the difference.

When Christ is the center of every doctrine and each biblical teaching reflects His character, those we are sharing the Scriptures with are much more likely to accept His Word.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 12.

Jesus: The Basis of Our Testimony

As Christians, we all have a personal story to tell, a story about how Jesus changed our lives and what He has done for us.

Read Ephesians 2:1–10. What were we like before we knew Christ? What is ours since we have accepted Christ?

A. Before we knew Christ (*Eph. 2:1–3*).

B. After we knew Christ (*Eph. 2:4–10*).

What an amazing change! Before we knew Christ, we were “dead in trespasses and sins,” “walked according to the course of this world,” “fulfilling the desires of the flesh,” and “were by nature children of wrath” (*NKJV*). To put it simply, before we knew Christ, we wandered aimlessly through life in a lost condition.

We may have experienced what appeared to be happiness, but there was an angst of the soul and an unfulfilled purpose in our lives. Coming to Christ and experiencing His love made all the difference. In Christ we are truly “alive.” Through the “exceeding riches of His grace” and His “rich . . . mercy” toward us, we have received the gift of salvation. He has raised us up to “sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (*NKJV*). In Christ, life has taken on new meaning and has new purpose. As John declares, “In Him was life, and the life was the light of men” (*John 1:4, NKJV*).

Read Ephesians 2:10. What does this text tell us about how central good works are to the Christian’s faith? How do we understand this idea in the context of salvation by faith “without the deeds of the law” (*Rom. 3:28*)?

How has your life changed because of Christ, a change that could possibly help someone else come to a knowledge of Jesus?

The Transformative Power of Personal Testimony

John and James, the sons of Zebedee, were known as the “ ‘Sons of Thunder’ ” (*Mark 3:17, NKJV*). In fact, it was Jesus who gave them their nickname. An illustration of John’s fiery disposition took place when Jesus and His disciples were traveling through Samaria. When they tried to find a place of lodging for the night, they met with opposition due to the prejudice of the Samaritans against the Jews. They were refused even the humblest of accommodations.

James and John thought they had the solution to the problem. “When His disciples James and John saw this, they said, ‘Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?’ ” (*Luke 9:54, NKJV*). Jesus rebuked the brothers, and they all left the village quietly. Jesus’ way is the way of love, not combative force.

In the presence of Jesus’ love, John’s impetuosity and anger were transformed to loving-kindness and a gentle, compassionate spirit. In John’s first epistle, the word *love* appears nearly 40 times; in its various forms, it appears 50 times.

Read 1 John 1:1–4, 1 John 3:1, 1 John 4:7–11, and 1 John 5:1–5. What do these passages tell you about John’s testimony and the changes that took place in his life because of his interaction with Jesus?

There is an eternal principle of the universe. Ellen G. White states this principle well in these words: “The exercise of force is contrary to the principles of God’s government; He desires only the service of love; and love cannot be commanded; it cannot be won by force or authority. Only by love is love awakened.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 22.

When we are committed to Christ, His love will shine through us to others. The greatest testimony of Christianity is a changed life. This does not mean we will never make mistakes and that we might at times not be the conduits of love and grace that we are supposed to be. But it does mean that, ideally, the love of Christ will flow from our lives, and we will be a blessing to those around us.

How well do you reflect the love of Christ to others? Think about the implications of your answer.

Telling the Story of Jesus

Who were the first missionaries that Jesus ever sent out? They were not among the disciples. They were not among His longtime followers. The first missionaries that Jesus sent out had been madmen, demoniacs who a few hours before had terrorized the countryside and struck fear into the hearts of the neighboring villagers.

With supernatural demonic power, one of these demoniacs broke the chains that bound him, shrieked in horrific tones, and mutilated his own body with sharp stones. The agony in their voices only reflected a deeper agony in their souls (*Matt. 8:28, 29; Mark 5:1–5*).

But then they met Jesus, and their lives were changed. They would never be the same. Jesus drove the tormenting demons out of their bodies into a herd of pigs and over a cliff into the sea (*Matt. 8:32–34; Mark 5:13, 14*).

Read Matthew 8:28–34. What happened to these men, and what did the townspeople find when they came out to see what had happened?

The demoniacs were now new men transformed by the power of Christ. The townspeople found them sitting at the feet of Jesus, listening to every word from the Master’s mouth. We should note that Matthew’s gospel says that there were two demoniacs delivered, while Mark’s gospel focuses the story on only one of the two. But the point is, Jesus restored them physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.

Read Mark 5:18–20. Obviously the changed demoniac, this new convert, wanted to stay with Jesus, but what did Christ send him to do?

“For a few moments only these men had been privileged to hear the teachings of Christ. Not one sermon from His lips had ever fallen upon their ears. They could not instruct the people as the disciples who had been daily with Christ were able to do. But they bore in their own persons the evidence that Jesus was the Messiah. They could tell what they knew; what they themselves had seen, and heard, and felt of the power of Christ. This is what everyone can do whose heart has been touched by the grace of God.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 340. Their testimonies prepared Decapolis, ten cities on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, to receive the teachings of Jesus. This is the power of personal testimony.

Testifying With Assurance

Read 1 John 5:11–13; Hebrews 10:19–22; and 1 Corinthians 15:1, 2. What assurance of eternal life do the Scriptures give us that allows us to testify of our salvation in Christ with certainty?

If we do not have the personal assurance of salvation in Jesus, it is not possible to share it with someone else. We cannot share what we do not have ourselves. There are conscientious Christians who live in a state of perpetual uncertainty, wondering whether they will ever be good enough to be saved. As a wise, old preacher once said, “When I look at myself, I see no possibility of being saved. When I look at Jesus, I see no possibility of being lost.” The Lord’s words ring with certainty down through the ages: “ ‘Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other’ ” (*Isa. 45:22*).

Our Lord wants each one of us to rejoice in the salvation that He so freely offers. He longs for us to experience what it means to be justified by His grace and be free from the condemnation that the guilt of sin brings. As Paul says in Romans 5, “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (*Rom. 5:1, NKJV*). He adds that we can have the assurance that “there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus” (*Rom. 8:1, NKJV*). The apostle John confirms that “he who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life” (*1 John 5:12, NKJV*).

If by faith we have accepted Jesus, and He lives in our hearts through His Holy Spirit, the gift of eternal life is ours today. This is not to say that once we have experienced the grace of God and salvation in Christ, we can never lose it (*2 Pet. 2:18–22, Heb. 3:6, Rev. 3:5*). We always have the free choice to walk away from Him; but once we have experienced His love and understood the depths of His sacrifice, we should never choose to walk away from One who loves us so much. Day by day we should look for opportunities to share with others the grace given us in Jesus.

Do you have assurance of salvation in Jesus? If so, on what do you base it? Why do you have that assurance? Where is it found? On the other hand, if you are not sure, why are you not sure? How can you find that assurance?

Something Worth Testifying About

“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (*Gal. 2:20*).

There are certainly sacrifices when we accept Christ. There are things He asks us to surrender. Jesus made plain the commitment it would take to follow Him: “ ‘If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me’ ” (*Luke 9:23, NKJV*). Death on a cross is a painful death. When we surrender our lives to the claims of Christ and this “old man” of sin is crucified (*see Rom. 6:6*), it is painful. It is painful at times to give up cherished desires and lifelong habits, but the rewards far outweigh the pain.

Powerful testimonies that have a life-changing impact on others focus on what Christ has done for us, not what we have given up for Him. They center on His sacrifice, not on our so-called “sacrifices.” For Christ never asks us to give up anything that it is in our best interest to retain.

Yet, the history of Christianity is filled with stories of those who had to make tremendous sacrifices for Christ’s sake—not that these people were earning salvation, or that their acts, no matter how selfless and sacrificial, gave them merit before God. Instead, in most cases, realizing what Christ has done for them, these men and women were willing to lay all on the altar of sacrifice, according to God’s calling in their life.

Read John 1:12, John 10:10, John 14:27, and 1 Corinthians 1:30. Our testimony always is based on what Christ has done for us. List some of the gifts of His grace mentioned in the texts above.

In light of the texts above, think about what Christ has done for you. You may have been a dedicated Christian all of your life, or possibly you have experienced a more dramatic conversion. Meditate on how good Jesus has been to you and the purpose, peace, and happiness He has given you. Think about the times He has given you the strength to get through the difficult experiences of your life.

What kind of sacrifices have you been called to make for the sake of Christ? What have you learned from your experiences that could be a blessing to others?

Further Thought: Read Mark 5:25–34.

“The wondering crowd that pressed close about Christ realized no accession of vital power. But when the suffering woman put forth her hand to touch Him, believing that she would be made whole, she felt the healing virtue. So in spiritual things. To talk of religion in a casual way, to pray without soul hunger and living faith, avails nothing. A nominal faith in Christ, which accepts Him merely as the Saviour of the world, can never bring healing to the soul. The faith that is unto salvation is not a mere intellectual assent to the truth. . . . It is not enough to believe *about* Christ; we must believe *in* Him. The only faith that will benefit us is that which embraces Him as a personal Saviour; which appropriates His merits to ourselves. . . .

“Our confession of His faithfulness is Heaven’s chosen agency for revealing Christ to the world. We are to acknowledge His grace as made known through the holy men of old; but that which will be most effectual is the testimony of our own experience. We are witnesses for God as we reveal in ourselves the working of a power that is divine. Every individual has a life distinct from all others, and an experience differing essentially from theirs. God desires that our praise shall ascend to Him, marked by our own individuality. These precious acknowledgments to the praise of the glory of His grace, when supported by a Christ-like life, have an irresistible power that works for the salvation of souls.”
—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 347.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What are the elements of a compelling testimony? Read Paul’s testimony before Agrippa in Acts 26:1–23. What was the foundation of his testimony?
- 2 Why do you think our personal testimony of what Christ has done for us is so powerful? How, however, do you answer the question: *OK, that is what happened to you, but what if I don’t have that kind of experience? Why should your experience be able to teach me anything about why I should follow Jesus?*
- 3 What are some of the things you would want to avoid when giving your testimony to a nonbeliever?
- 4 Dwell on the question regarding assurance of salvation. Why is this such an important part of the Christian experience? How can we be assured of our own salvation while, at the same time, not being presumptuous?

Dead Woman Talking

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Tomasz Karauda, a 28-year-old Seventh-day Adventist physician in Poland, was asked to sign the death certificate of a woman who was still alive.

A nurse wheeled the woman over to the respiratory unit where Tomasz was doing his hospital residency.

By all appearances, she was dead. She had lung cancer, brought on by years of smoking. Rigor mortis was setting in, with the blood settling in her lower back. Her skin, usually pink as oxygen-filled blood flowed through her capillaries, had turned pale as her blood drained into the larger veins. Her condition was irreversible.

"I had never seen anything like that before," Tomasz said, recalling the moment. "She was dead, yet she was sitting in the wheelchair and talking."

The woman had been hospitalized in the crowded intensive care unit, but her physician, seeing that he could do nothing more, had sent her out in order to free up a bed for another serious case. The nurse asked Tomasz whether the woman could stay in the respiratory unit.

The respiratory unit also didn't have any free beds, so Tomasz placed a rolling bed into the corridor and gently laid the woman on it. Pulling up a chair, he sat down and spoke with her for the next two hours.

The woman knew that she was dying. She expressed regret over her life choices.

"I spent my entire life smoking," she said. "If only I could go back and do it over again."

Tomasz didn't know what to say. He felt as if he was caught in the biblical story of the thieves on the crosses. He held the woman's hand.

Finally the woman took her last breath. Tomasz signed the death certificate. "It is a great responsibility to be a Christian physician," said Tomasz, who studied at a public medical school. "No one taught us in medical school how to deal with a situation like that."

He has found that it is helpful to take someone's hand and offer hope, saying, "Everything is going to be all right," even though the dying person knows that the only thing waiting is death.



"Sometimes it's best to say nothing at all," he said. "Sometimes the only thing you can do is hold someone's hand and pray silently."

The world is dying in sin. In many cases, rigor mortis is setting in, and the condition may seem irreversible. Will you hold someone's hand? Will you pray? Will you offer hope?

Key Text: *1 John 5:11–13*

Study Focus: *1 John 5:1–3, Ephesians 2:1–8, Mark 5:15–19, Hebrews 10:19–22.*

Part I: Overview

The power of New Testament witnessing is the power of personal testimony. The first-century believers shared a Christ they knew from experience. Make-believe Christians, if there is such a term, will never change the world. When Christ dwells in our hearts through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, our lives are changed.

Witnessing is a laborious task if it is merely a duty or religious obligation. It is a delight if it comes from a heart overflowing with love for the Christ who has redeemed us. When we are in love, we enjoy talking about the one we love. What holds true for human love certainly holds true for divine love, as well. The power of New Testament witnessing was precisely this—believers spontaneously shared a Christ they loved. Witnessing was not a legalistic requirement; it was the heart’s response to Christ’s sacrifice on the cross.

In this week’s lesson, we will rediscover how powerful our personal testimonies are in influencing others for Christ. The transformative power of our personal testimony is not how bad we once were or how good we now are. It is about the Christ who came to this sin-cursed world on a mission of love to redeem us. We can testify with assurance, not because of who we are but because of who He is.

Part II: Commentary

In Ephesians 2, the apostle Paul describes the change that takes place when an individual accepts Christ. He declares that we “once walked according to the course of this world” (*Eph. 2:2, NKJV*). We “conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath” (*Eph. 2:3, NKJV*). The expression “children of wrath” simply means that we are by our very nature sinners and worthy of God’s judgment or wrath. The prophet Jeremiah states that “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (*Jer. 17:9*). Isaiah adds that even our so-called righteousness is as “filthy rags” (*Isa. 64:6*). The reason our righteousness is described as filthy rags is because it comes from a sin-polluted heart. Without Christ, we are hopelessly lost, in bondage to our sinful natures.

Paul continues his discussion of the plan of salvation by declaring that “God, who is rich in mercy,” has “made us alive together with Christ” and “raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places” (*Eph. 2:4–6, NKJV*). He has saved us by His grace not because of our righteous deeds (*Eph. 2:8*). It is all of grace. By His grace, He pardons us from the guilt of sin and delivers us from the grip of sin. By His grace, He saves us from sin’s penalty and delivers us from sin’s power. Salvation by grace releases us from the condemnation of sin and the bondage or domination of sin. We who were once dead in trespasses and sins are now alive in Christ. The expression used in Ephesians 2:5 for “made alive” or “quicken” in the King James Version means a rebirth. In Christ, it is like we are born all over again, starting anew with a new identity in Christ, a new start in Christ, and new power in Christ. With this new walk in Christ, we are “His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (*Eph. 2:10, NKJV*). The Greek word for “workmanship” is *poiema*. We get our English word “poem” from it. When Christ re-creates us for the glory of His name, He writes a poem of our life through the good works that His Spirit empowers us to do before the entire universe.

Grace for All

Here is some incredibly good news. God’s grace is not only available to a select few. But the apostle Paul makes it plain that it also is freely given to all. He states, “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation” (*Eph. 2:13, 14, NKJV*). The expression “the middle wall of separation” is a remarkable one. The Jews would allow no non-Jew to enter the Jewish temple. There was a stone barrier four and a half feet high with 13 large stone slabs written in both Greek and Latin, warning Gentiles or foreigners that if they proceeded beyond this outer temple enclosure, they would do so at the risk of their lives.

The Jewish historian Josephus states this warning clearly. “There was a partition made of stone. . . . Its construction was very elegant; upon it stood pillars, at equal distances from one another, declaring the law of purity, some in Greek, and some in Roman letters that ‘no foreigner should go within that sanctuary.’ ”—Flavius Josephus, *History of the Jewish War* (5.5.2), quoted in NIV, *Archaeological Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishers, 2005), p. 1917. Gentiles had no access to the presence of God in the Jewish sanctuary. Christ changed all of that. His grace provides direct access to the Father. All who by faith receive the salvation that He so freely offers will have entrance into His eternal kingdom.

The gospel is for all. Salvation is for all. Forgiveness, mercy, pardon, and grace are for all. The New Testament believers grasped the marvel of His grace, and they could not be silent. They understood the assurance of eternal life in Christ. They lived to tell the story of His abounding grace. As we grasp the significance of His grace, we, too, will live to tell His story.

Grace Changes Us

Grace changes us. James and John, sometimes known as the “sons of thunder,” were transformed by grace. You do not call someone a “son of thunder” because he or she has a mild, passive, laid-back disposition. James and John were dynamos who could easily become quick tempered or impatient. They were highly competitive and sought positions in Christ’s new kingdom. Christ’s sacrificial love changed them at the very core of their being. James was eventually martyred, and John, who lived well into his nineties, never tired of telling the story of the love that changed his life. One writer said, “John wrote with his pen dipped in love.” John was changed by love and had to tell the story. The apostle Paul adds, “The love of Christ compels us” (*2 Cor. 5:14, NKJV*). In other words, Christ’s love prompts us, motivates us, and compels us to tell the story of salvation.

Ellen G. White states it this way: “Love is a heavenly attribute. The natural heart cannot originate it. This heavenly plant only flourishes where Christ reigns supreme. Where love exists, there is power and truth in the life. Love does good, and nothing but good. Those who have love bear fruit unto holiness, and in the end everlasting life.”—*The Youth’s Instructor*, January 13, 1898.

Telling the story of Jesus is telling the story of how His grace has worked in our lives. Witnessing is not a spiritual gift given to only a very few people. It is the role of every Christian. Simply tell what Christ has done for you. Share with others the peace you have found in Jesus. Tell them how Christ gave you purpose in your life. Pray for opportunities to tell those around you the joy you have in following Jesus. Tell them how you grasped His promises by faith and found them to be true. Share answers to your prayers or Bible promises that are meaningful to you. You will be surprised at how others will respond to a faith that is genuine.

In an earlier lesson, we mentioned the demoniac. Just imagine the power of his witness as he shared what Christ had done for him. Who could possibly argue against a testimony that was so real! Changed lives are the most powerful testimony possible. There are those who will argue against what you believe. They will debate your theology, but few people will argue against the testimony of a changed life. As Ellen G. White so

beautifully states, “The strongest argument in favor of the gospel is a loving and lovable Christian.”—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 470. The critics were silent in the face of the amazing changes in the demoniac’s life. As Christ’s love flows through your life, others will be moved to seek the Christ who has changed you and given you such peace and joy.

Christian Assurance

If someone asked you the question, “Do you have eternal life?” how would you respond? Would your answer be vague or certain? Would you say, “I sure hope so” or “I wish I knew” or “I am not certain”? Jesus wants you to have the certainty of eternal life. The apostle John declares that “God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son” (*1 John 5:11, NKJV*). He then adds words too clear to be misunderstood: “He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life” (*1 John 5:11–13, NKJV*). As long as we have Jesus Christ living in our lives, the gift of eternal life is ours. He is life, and in Him we have life. It is this assurance that gives power to our witness. Our assurance is not based on our good works or our superior righteousness. It is based on Christ alone, who lives in our lives by the Holy Spirit producing good works through us.

Part III: Life Application

Is it possible to be an effective witness for Christ without the assurance of salvation in your own life? Some Adventist Christians are concerned about accepting the biblical teaching of the assurance of salvation because of Ellen G. White’s statement that indicates we should never say that we are saved. (See *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 155.) A careful analysis of this statement reveals that she was speaking in the context of “once saved always saved.” She was speaking of the false assurance of self-confidence, of the erroneous idea that when I come to Christ, I can never fall away and be lost. This doctrine easily can lead to complacency in our Christian lives and the justification of our own sinful behavior. The grace of God is not “cheap.” It changes our lives. Regarding the assurance of salvation in Jesus, Ellen G. White was clear. She stated, “Each one of you may know for yourself that you have a living Saviour, that he is your helper and your God. You need not stand where you say, ‘I do not know whether I am saved.’ Do you believe in Christ as your personal Saviour? If you do, then rejoice.”—*General Conference Bulletin*, April 10, 1901.

Encourage your class to share why they believe the assurance of salvation

is the basis of all effective witnessing. Have a class member read 1 John 5:11–13 and discuss these verses in class. Where is the assurance of eternal life found?

Read and discuss the following statement:

“When once the gaze is fixed upon Him, the life finds its center. . . . Duty becomes a delight and sacrifice a pleasure. To honor Christ, to become like Him, to work for Him, is the life’s highest ambition and its greatest joy.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 297.

Notes
