

SHARE: THE VERBAL WITNESS PRINCIPLE, JOHN 9

Life on Mission #4

◆Intro: Today we're on our third action point for living a Life on Mission. In this 6 week series we're talking about how we can live as witnesses to the real power and presence of God in the world. In week 1 we observed that God has left us here on the earth to point to him; to be a witness, not a judge, not a defense attorney. A witness. Here's a text we'll actually look at together today that supports that.

◆*"... you are a chosen people. You are a kingdom of priests, God's holy nation, his very own possession. This is so you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light." 1 Peter 2:9, NLT.*

◆Now people have different approaches to pointing to the reality of God. Here's how it went in the classroom of one sharp little 6 year old girl. The teacher was trying to explain the beginning of the world from an atheistic point of view. The teacher asked a little boy, "Tommy do you see the tree outside?"

TOMMY: Yes.

TEACHER: Tommy, do you see the grass outside?

TOMMY: Yes.

TEACHER: Go outside and look up and see if you can see the sky.

TOMMY: Okay. (He returned a few minutes later) Yes, I saw the sky.

TEACHER: Did you see God?

TOMMY: No.

TEACHER: That's my point. We can't see God because he isn't there. He doesn't exist.

That's when the little girl spoke up and wanted to ask the boy some

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questions. The teacher agreed and the little girl asked the boy, "Tommy, do you see the tree outside?"

TOMMY: Yes.

LITTLE GIRL: Tommy do you see the grass outside?

TOMMY: Yessssss (getting tired of the questions by this time).

LITTLE GIRL: Did you see the sky?

TOMMY: Yessssss

LITTLE GIRL: Tommy, do you see the teacher?

TOMMY: Yes

LITTLE GIRL: Do you see her brain? ...

TOMMY: No

LITTLE GIRL: so then we should suppose it isn't there, according to what we've just heard.

◆Ok, so maaaybe not the approach we really wanna take when it comes to asserting that God is real and we've experienced the difference he makes in our lives. We'll get at that more in a minute. We talked in week 2 about connecting: finding ways to let our stations in life intersect, and making friends with people who need God like we do. In week 3 our action step was service; simply do something for others that lets them experience the love of God in their lives. Today, action step #4: share, that is, share verbally your story of the difference God makes in your life. This is really powerful, folks because people can and will argue theology, religion, worldviews – and that's fine. It's necessary and we need to address all those things. But maybe not first. Besides, nobody can argue with your experience. It's a pretty solid place to start. The Bible says...

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◆ *“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,” 1 Peter 3:15, NIV.*

◆ Lets read one of my favorite accounts of a man sharing the story of the difference Jesus made for him. It's in John 9...

◆ Ok, you'll notice a whole handful of reactions to the activity of God in this text. The first reaction, that of the man's neighbors is apathetic disbelief which leads us to this observation:

◆ **1. I need to be able to make a clear explanation of my hope in Christ.**

Why? Just because something amazing happens, doesn't mean people can grasp it. Here we have a man born blind who gets healed but even something miraculous doesn't necessarily or automatically convince the heart. These folks in the story are the blind man's neighbors and they can't believe that this could happen. That this is Charlie, the kid who was blind in the baby buggy. Blind all through little league age so only sat on the sidelines listening to the games going on. Blind through high school, walking the halls with one of those long white sticks so he didn't trip on the girls sitting by the lockers putting on fingernail designs. Blind when all the other kids were getting their camel licenses. There was no lasik, no surgery. No Mayo Clinic. No global travel. Charlie can see, but there isn't room for that in their thought process so they don't marvel at it! Incredible isn't it? Isn't it odd that none of these Jewish believers jumped to conclude, “Whoa, God must be real cuz here's Chuck and he can see.” But no. No rejoicing. No rushing around in excitement wanting to hear every detail of

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the story recounted. They just take him of to the religious guys (Pharisees) to deal with it. “Ach. That religious stuff. We don’t talk about that.”

◆What see going on is a kind of “pass-it-off” attitude. Many people assume that God and his acts are for the religious types and not for ordinary people and so they almost necessarily miss the miracles all around them.

◆This is one reason why an articulate summary of our faith is an essential part of a Life on Mission. Don’t be surprised really. We’re all like this. Sometimes the Spirit whispers to you “I want you to reach out to so-and-so.” But we pass it off as probably not God. Or we get violently sick, right? And we start praying and asking God “WHY do you let this happen?” And we take our drugs and when we’re better we figure we got a germ of some sort and the meds did the trick. Isn’t it true that we easily forget that someone made those chemicals, and someone gave mankind the wisdom to discover them?

◆*“You may say to yourself, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.” But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today.” Deuteronomy 8:17, 18, NIV.*

◆Lots of times, as even medical professionals will tell you, there is no medical explanation for why, or why not someone did, or didn't get better. Human kind fail to make the connections all the time. There is a place for laying it out clearly. Listen, people who study these things tell us that someone has to clearly hear the Gospel message

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7.6 times before they get it. You could be #3, or #.6, you don't know.

They gotta hear it clearly.

◆Ok, the second reaction to the blind man's cure is the Pharisees and from them we learn another thing about Life on Mission.

◆2. Judgementalism will keep me from a life on Mission.

◆It's pretty clear the Pharisees weren't changing the world. There are no First Church of the Pharisees today are there. But there are hundreds of thousands of Churches of Christ! The Pharisees totally missed the activity of God right before their eyes because God didn't fit into their carefully coded tradition.

◆v18 flat out says they figured this Chuck fellow was never blind in the first place.

◆v24 is a Hebrew idiom. You know, like we say, "It's raining cats and dogs!" No one has ever seen a cat fall out of a cloud. And no canine lands on the roof in a storm. It's weird, I know and don't ask me where it came from but everyone knows it means it's really pouring outside. So "give glory to God" was the Hebrew way of saying, "Don't mess with me. 'Fess up and tell the truth." They figure if he was blind, he's hiding the real answer because there is *no way some guy healed him on the Sabbath. Everyone knows if you do work on the Sabbath you are a breaker of God's law!* At least that's how they took Sabbath. Pity their neighbor drowning in a lake on the Sabbath because a Pharisee would literally have to let 'em sink so as to "honor" the Sabbath.

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◆To them, Jesus was a sinner, and his church was a sinner church because they would do acts of kindness on Sunday (kinda like we're gonna do today, in fact.) Its ironic. In a story of a blind man seeing, these folks are actually and completely blind to the presence of the Son of God in their midst. It strikes me that to be a church on mission, or to live a life on mission, we need to put aside a lot of judging. It hold back the mission, doesn't it?

◆“He can't be a serious candidate for becoming Christian. He has too many tattoos and a really big ear-lobe gaging.”

◆“We know they can't be godly. They sing secular songs.”

◆“Doesn't the Bible say somewhere, “come out from among them”? Keep your distance from the wayward of the world. Shop with Christians. Sell to Christians. Educate with Christians. Party with Christians.”

◆Check out what Jesus said in his prayer in John 17...

◆*“I have given them your word. And the world hates them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not. I'm not asking you to take them out of the world, but to keep them safe from the evil one. They are not part of this world any more than I am. Make them pure and holy by teaching them your words of truth. As you sent me into the world, I am sending them into the world.” John 17:14-18, NLT.*

◆If we, like the Pharisees, are most concerned with the legality of religious practices we will probably not have much to say or even notice when God is curing a life, or ripening the harvest.

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◆Next reaction to the change God made in a life is the parents. And from them we see another thing.

◆3. I may miss the Messiah if I'm focused on my makeup!

◆Im gonna be really short on this one because I want to get to the coolest reaction in the story. But the parents were basically so concerned with how they looked to everyone and the social implications that they never got in on the thrill of meeting Jesus! They were asked three questions they only answered two. They avoid the question in v21: we don't know how come he can see. They kept quiet out of social fear. (v22 to be "put out of the synagogue" was to get kicked off the membership at church. They literally held a mock funeral for you! Now you might think that the parents would be like, "Hey, hold your silly funeral. Kick us out. Our boy can see! This is awesome. Lets go meet this miracle worker!" But no. And they miss the weight of what went down that day. As far as we know they don't meet Jesus. They don't live in the experience of the difference he can make. And in the same way, we miss Jesus' presence and power when we are too afraid to bring him up in conversation lest our social makeup get marred somehow and people think we look weird.

◆The temptation for a lot of us is to never bring up the topic of Jesus. We'll talk about the Colts, or the Boilermakers. Or where we'll go for Christmas this year. But if we're friends with someone, eventually something will lead into a spiritual conversation and you're going to have to go down that road. Most of the time the reason we don't is that we're afraid of how we'll look; dumb, weird, or whatever.

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◆But now on to the blind man's reaction to Jesus. He's a great example of the fact that...

◆4. When I share my faith story my faith grows.

◆Did you notice that Charlie's testimony grows over time? In verse 11 he refers to the "man they call Jesus" but he doesn't know where he is. In verse 17 he refers to Jesus as a "prophet". By verse 27 he's decided to follow Jesus as a disciple. He asks the Pharisees if they want to be his disciple too! By verse 32 Chuck has reasoned that Jesus must be straight from God. In verse 38 he's flat out worshiping the man as his God. His faith grew with each telling of his story! His testimony is a great model for us.

◆A. When sharing my faith I don't have to know everything. When the blind man didn't know he said so (v25). No worries. There are things he does know. He knows Jesus put mud on his eyes and he washed and now he can see (v15). He knows he used to be blind, and now he's not. (v25) When they ask him what happened you will note his answer was not, "We'll, you see, the incarnate son of God came to the earth, and he has the power from on high for although he is fully man, and he is fully God, and he graciously put aside his glory to carry my infirmities. It's in essence a matter of substitutionary atonement!" –Now that would be absolutely true and biblically correct. But that's not where he starts, is it? Tim Harlow puts it: you don't have to enter the gay marriage debate. You don't need to explain creation vs. evolution. You don't have to apologize for bad-haired televangelists. You just tell what you know.

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◆B. When sharing my faith I simply need my BC and AD. That is, your “before Christ” and your “after Christ” (or Anno Domini, “the year of our Lord). Before I was blind. Now I can see. That’s my story and I’m sticking to it. This is true for every Christian whether you grew up always a believer, or you just became one: you just tell what life was/is like without Christ in it, and then with Christ in it.

◆“Before I was a very angry person and now my heart is far more at peace.”

◆“Before I ran to my addiction for escape but Christ freed me from it!”

◆“I used to not even notice the seasons. I was a workaholic living for nothing. Now I know why I’m on earth and I see all kinds of beauties I never saw before I started talking to Jesus each day.”

◆How are you different because you know God? This is your assignment, should you chose to accept it. This week, write a simple paragraph about your BC and AC. No three hour tale, ok. Nobody wants to hear a three hour story, not even your friends. It's simple, "I was self-destructive, but now I'm healthy." "I was guilty for all my sins, but now I'm free." "I was afraid to die, but now I am at peace." "I was without hope, but now I believe I have hope for eternity." One hundred words or less. If you want help, send us your story and we’ll help you focus it. Just email it to me at randallbergsma@sunriseccrc.org and I’ll either help you directly or get one of our staff or leaders to do so. If there is no difference Jesus has made in your life, let me invite you right now to invite him into your heart. Ask him to forgive your sins, take away your guilt, and free you from the wrong in your life. He will. Take him up on it.

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◆**Conclusion:** Take your cue from the Word of God.

◆ *Psalm 66:16. "Listen and I'll tell you what God has done for me."*

◆ Some folks are fond of quoting Francis of Assisi call to Christian service: "Preach the gospel. If necessary use words." And yes one of our action points is service. But listen church, the good news about Jesus will never get out without words. Ed Stetzer wrote, "Saying, "Preach the gospel and when necessary use words", is a lot like saying "feed the hungry and when necessary use food." " Somewhere along the line of a life on mission we need to share our story of what God has done for us.

◆ *"For "Anyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." But how can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them? And how will anyone go and tell them without being sent? That is what the Scriptures mean when they say, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"*" Romans 10:13-15, NLT.