

Sharing Our Faith

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[0 : 0 0] Can I look at the subject of sharing our faith this evening? We looked this morning at our faith being tested and this evening we're looking at sharing our faith but I'm not going to read any specific passage rather what I'm going to do, I'm going to bring up passages on the screen hopefully and verses from passages in the Bible and split the kind of service into three bits.

First of all looking at five real people which we have in the Bible and that help us I hope to share the...

or help us to understand, there we go, the first... the whole idea of sharing our faith and I want just to look at these five people that Jesus brought to faith and that trusted in Jesus and if we can then see maybe the different aspects in their lives that we can be challenged by ourselves and the first is legion.

Mark 5, I've got the references on the note you can just read them on the screen if you so desire. As Jesus was getting into the boat this is after he had healed legion the man with many evil spirits in him man who'd been demon possessed, begged to go with him Jesus did not let him but said go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how He has ad-merci on you so the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him and all the people were amazed.

And here's someone who's come to faith in Jesus Christ Jesus has healed him in a very dramatic way and the temptation for him is just I just want to follow Jesus and be with His disciples and be in that kind of rarefied atmosphere and enjoy all that I can learn from Jesus and the temptation for him was to follow Jesus Christ away from his world rather than taking Jesus Christ into his world and that's often a temptation for us isn't it?

[2 : 1 2] That we would rather follow Christ but follow Him away from the reality of our lives rather than taking Christ into the world and maybe it's even exacerbated by the fact we come to church we come away from the world into church and we forget the world that we may be living and having left church we maybe forget the Christ that has saved us and we forget to take Him with us into the world but Jesus says to Legion, I know it's tempting, but go to your family go to your family and tell them what I've done for you that's a great message that he brings we don't know any of the history of the family do we?

we know that Legion was kind of was abandoned to the caves and he was chained up he was maybe very difficult maybe the family had struggled with him for years maybe they were wracked with guilt about the way they've treated him but Jesus knows and he says, look, go and tell your family the people closest to you what he has done for you tremendous tell them about me tell them about the mercy I've shown them tell them about the Lord and that's a great invitation from Jesus for us to share our faith not primarily arguing with people about science versus creation or about political philosophy and all that goes with abstract philosophy but Jesus Christ tell them about Jesus Christ tell them about the mercy that Jesus Christ has had in your life and share that with them that's what we're asked to do we're asked to share the faith we have in Jesus Christ then secondly we come to the prostitute, or we presume she's a prostitute a woman of ill repute that Jesus heals from her broken heart

Luke 7 when a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the farthest house she brought an alabaster jar of perfume and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping she began to wet his feet with her tears then she wiped him with her hair, kissed him and poured perfume on them and here's a girl who's sharing her faith not verbally but very practically in a costly and in a humiliating way at one level there's a great cost to her displaying her love and her loyalty to Jesus Christ in this kind of very eastern as opposed to very western way of showing her love opening herself to ridicule and to vulnerability and highlighting in a sense her past her past would have been well known and would have been gossiped as the elbows would have nudged see who's here and see what she's doing she's displaying her love and loyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ there wasn't any sense of self righteousness with her but she was willing to confess her saviour in this very public way as an extravagant reflection of the forgiveness that she knows she had received from him and the challenge is for us that it's not just by what we say that we share our faith but how we reflect our extravagant love for Jesus Christ however we would do that that we would make clear to people that we have been forgiven much that we're exposing the vulnerability of ourselves not self righteous in any way as we share our faith then we come to Zacchaeus

I'm just picking out some different characters in the New Testament you know the story of Zacchaeus who Jesus he wanted to go and see Zacchaeus a little man climbs up a tree Jesus passes by invites him down and he wants to go and eat in his house and he hears the gospel and is redeemed and saved and at the end of the story we're told Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord look Lord here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor and if I have cheated anybody out of anything I will pay back four times the amount again this is Zacchaeus at the very early stages of his faith sharing his faith in a practical pragmatic way he's not preaching at people but he's simply evidencing a changed heart a new heart greedy selfish kind of ambitious little Zacchaeus who hoarded all his money and stole from his fellow countrymen in order to line his own pockets is one who is a new heart and he shows it by exposing the cheating heart that he had and is willing to repay and give out all the money that he had kind of gained over the years recognizing this great change in his values in his priorities making restitution as he sees what Christ has done

Christ has changed my life and my life's been a mess and so I want to restore to other people the hurt that I've caused and the damage that I've caused he never seemed to give any indication of caring about people in the past and now here we are as the first evidence of his newfound faith a desire and a concern for others and for people faith has changed his priorities and he's willing to right the wrongs and that will often be how our faith has shared maybe not at the outset of our faith but further on down the line as Christians how do we share our faith?

[8 : 37] well if we've wronged somebody we confess that and we seek to make restitution we seek to put right the wrongs because we recognize that we've been forgiven and we seek not only to forgive others but to be forgiven ourselves so we have Zikias then we have the Samaritan woman from John chapter 4 remember she goes out at midday to draw water as is her task but she doesn't do it early in the morning like all the other women who go to draw water because she's ashamed and she's kind of ostracized and cut off from people she's scandalized because of her life and her lifestyle so she goes at a time when there's nobody around to draw water and of course there she meets Jesus Christ and Jesus challenges her very personally and she gradually comes to faith and as a response to that we're told in verse 28 then leaving her water jar the woman went back to the town and said to the people come see a man who told me everything I ever did could this be the Christ?

he came out of the town and made their way towards him so you see that Christ transformed her to the point of completely changing her round her priorities previously she'd been married several times and now the guy she was living with wasn't her wife it wasn't her husband even it wasn't her wife either but this person was avoiding contact because she was socially outcast she'd go out on her own she would avoid company but as Christ has changed her heart the first thing she wants to do is to go and meet people the very people she was previously avoiding to tell them about the Christ and so there's this great change again in her life and her desire to share Christ replaces her fear and stigma of what other people think of her and she wants Christ to be known the spotlight you see has moved from herself and moves towards Christ and her fear of others has changed and she rather share Christ with other people rather than fear them and then we come to the witty blind man

I've always liked the story in John's Gospel I think he's a great character wish we knew his name I look forward to finding out about him in heaven but he just seems to be a bit of a character he's blind and Jesus heals him and the Pharisees are kind of they're angry in a sense about this and they go and question the man and the man speaks to them and in some ways he's quite cheeky as he speaks back to them but you know we're told that a second time they summoned a man who'd been born blind give glory to God they said we know this man that is Jesus as a sinner he replied whether he's a sinner or not I don't know one thing I do know I was blind but now I see so there's a very simple testifying to what's happened in his life physically for him he was blind and he could see but there's also faith lying behind that and then as they kind of argue with that all the way down the line the guy in a sense probably gets a bit exacerbated and says oh now that's remarkable he says you know you don't know where he comes from yet he opened my eyes and he's exposing their folly and their unwillingness to accept that Jesus Christ is the Son of God but here's this man who again transformed by Christ and has not a proud self-confidence but a Christ-centered confidence and a simple faith

I love what he says I know physically he was talking about blindness but we can apply that very powerfully spiritually to our lives when we testify and share our faith the simple fact we can say is well once I was blind but now I see now I see my own need once I was blind to God once I was blind to Christ once I was blind to salvation and now I see and Christ has opened my eyes and he's transformed me and that is the core and basic reality of our testifying to our faith it's through the cross and what Christ has done for us on the cross foolishness to Greeks stumbling block the Jews but when we go out with the Gospel when we share our faith we have to share this reality that we have been brought to see that we are saved that we're redeemed and that Christ Jesus is central to all that we are and all that we do so there's five people there whose lives have been changed and are being changed and they are sharing their faith and their lives their closest families with their neighbourhoods with whoever comes into contact with them and their Christ confident and I hope we can learn from that from these examples about sharing our faith in a Christ confident way

I want them to look after we're going to sing again and then I'm going to look at five truths that are related to these we're not related to these five illustrations but so we come to not just five real people at this time but this time to five real truths and I'm going through these very quickly, well you maybe don't think it's very quick but it is I'm going through them quite quickly because hopefully on Wednesday evening those of you can come we can spend more time discussing them and all the information's on the on the notes so you can if you so desire look at it at more leisure and in more depth and I hope you will and I hope the Spirit of God will challenge each of us to think about sharing our faith and sharing our faith maybe in ways that we haven't considered and maybe by looking at what we're looking at now we'll be challenged by that and the first of these truths is it's what God wants us to do in Acts 1 verse 8 he says, but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes in you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth and you know paralleling the commission of

[15 : 31] Jesus Christ to the disciples to to make disciples to share the faith and to go out and tell people and be witnesses for Jesus Christ and what he's done in our lives and that goes out to all Christendom that goes out to every Christian that we are to be the witnesses of what Jesus Christ has done for us and we share that faith I don't need to say any more about that, it's very simple and it's all encompassing there's not kind of levels and grades of Christians that some are asked not to share their faith some are asked just to be absolutely private, quiet Christians and never say anything or never live in such a way that reflects the change in their lives we are all to share just by our being we are to share our faith in Christ but one aspect of sharing our faith that's maybe often left out when we talk about sharing our faith is we often think of sharing our faith simply as what we do with unbelievers people who don't know Jesus Christ and maybe the examples I gave you of people where more or less people who share their faith with the world but one of the most important aspects of sharing our faith is sharing it together sharing it with each other as Christians

Romans 1, 11, 12 says, I long to see, this is Paul speaking to the church in Rome that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong that is that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith mutually encouraged by each other's faith and then in Ephesians 5, 9 speak to one another with Sam's hymns and spiritual songs sing and make music in your heart to the Lord always giving thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and these are two texts that kind of just summarise the whole of the New Testament emphasis about being willing as Christians to share our faith with each other you know it's going to be kind of difficult with us to live as Christians among non-Christians or to share our faith verbally with those who aren't Christians if we never do it among ourselves if we never talk about Christ among ourselves if the topic of conversation and the centrality of Christ is not part of our

Christian community as we share Christ together it will not be easy for us to share it with those who are not part of the Christian community our Christian responsibility and privilege is to share our faith intra-church within the church within our Christian friendships it's not just that we have Christian friends but that as Christians we share our faith together building each other up is what Paul says there that we might be mutually encouraged in each other's faith and that we share and Ephesians speaks about singing singing about Christ and how we do that in worship as we sing together and I mentioned that this morning that singing reflects very often or can reflect how we think about encouraging each other in song not just how we worship God and so there's this very important emphasis for us to be testifying and witnessing and sharing of Christ to each other

I wonder if we've seen that in terms of sharing our faith I think sometimes the trouble is that we feel that when we're with Christians actually the guard can go down and we can not only the guard can go down as it were I don't need to worry, I speak or what I say or what I do because I'm with Christians and they don't mind anyway but if I'm with non-Christians well I need to show a good you know kind of witness and they need to remember that I'm an ambassador for Christ somehow we sometimes get it mixed up and rather than encouraging each other in the Christian faith as Christians we actually drag each other down so that as Christians we sin together we do wrong things together we make our faith colder together by maybe bitterness or by just our choice of behaviour or our conversation or our viewing or our past times and that we never speak about Christ, we're embarrassed to speak and share our faith and share our strengths and weaknesses, our good times and our bad times with our fellow Christians and yet there's such an importance in that isn't there there's such an importance that we as young as people sorry okay I'm not cleaning myself in the young there but we as people encourage one another and I really am what I was going to

I'm jumping ahead of myself that you as young people here young in the faith and young people maybe some of you coming to the city away from home for the first time that you build strong Christian relationships and you use your Christian relationships to build each other up that you don't swan away in sinful behaviour with your fellow Christians because oh that's good they're doing that oh and their Christians and maybe I can do that as well and move away from Christ rather than coming closer to Christ it's great to have so many young people and you're a really cool bunch but let's be cool and godly be cool and godly, let's let us recognise that build each other up be wholehearted in sharing the faith and maybe speak a little bit more about that as we go on be prepared as a third of the five principles about witnessing being prepared one of my favourite verses from the whole Bible but in your heart 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 keeping a clear conscience so that those who speak maliciously against your good behaviour and Christ may be ashamed of their slander so here we have a great encouragement to the church to the churches of Asia and to the the fledgling New Testament churches to be prepared to be ready when the opportunity comes, you know, because people will ask this isn't about ramming the Gospel down people's throats this is about simply being ready when the opportunities come, which they will if we're living for Christ because we've set Him apart in our hearts no good in sharing the Gospel if Christ isn't set apart in our hearts you know, if we're being duplicitous or double standards we have to be prepared and we do that, don't we?

[22 : 59] many of you will be sitting exams shortly if you're students you want to be prepared for that some of you will be looking to have an interview for a job be prepared for that some are getting married you want to be prepared for that it's part of life, we get prepared for things and God is telling us that we should be prepared and in other words ready when the opportunity comes not just to kind of get all our words mixed up and not have a reason for the hope within us we should revise our testimony we should prepare it, we should maybe even write it down we should practice it in the mirror we should be ready when someone asks us, well you're a Christian, why are you a Christian?

why have you done that in your life? and the motivation is because you're a Christian share the reason that you're a Christian very often the opportunities come and we're tongue tied we have no idea of what to say or we just splurge out something that's completely impersonal or just a kind of random vomiting out of texts that mean nothing to the person and mean nothing really to you but you think that's what you ought to say be prepared to give a personal reason why are you a Christian?

why you believe it doesn't need to be are you diked? but it needs to be you it needs to be real and it needs to be prepared we like being prepared in life and that's important you know it'll be triggered by an authentic Christian life as we're set in Christ apart as Lord how do we do that?

we give him priority we give him preeminence we're in touch with him, we're praying to him reading his word we're in fellowship, we're walking the walk so that is how we're encouraged there and to do so the favourite bit is with gentleness and respect isn't it?

that's how we share our faith never kind of arrogantly or in a kind of brash way both gentleness and with respect be prepared, be passionate I'm not really going to say anything about these two verses but I just want to read them and I want you to think and ask the Holy Spirit to challenge you about them Jeremiah 20 when he's challenged not to say anything about his God but if I say I will not mention him or speak any more in his name his word is in my heart like a fire a fire shut up in my bones I am weary of holding it in, indeed I cannot or in Acts 4 the early disciples as they're preaching and as they're brought before the Sanhedrin Peter and John replied when they're asked to be silent judge for yourselves whether it's right in God's sight to be you rather than God for we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard

[26 : 09] I think from my experience of myself and from the world in which we live we're far too moderate in our Christianity we're far too lukewarm and we find this passion alien because well it's not part of our own experience as I read these verses I stand convicted and I suspect maybe some of you do also stand convicted that our faith has become moderate and simply reasonable and calm and passionless and lukewarm and it doesn't really matter whether we serve or not or follow or not passionate and the last of these principles is that we are to share our faith without shame 2 Timothy 1 for God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline so do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord or ashamed of me as prisoner it's a very interesting principle again that we can if we're honest I think with ourselves associate with that we've been given God's spirit as believers and it's not a spirit of timidity but it is this great Holy Spirit of power, love and self-discipline and the the temptation for us isn't it is to be ashamed at different levels maybe someone says after maybe you've, I don't know, you know maybe you've been unfaithful in your marriage or you've been living disillutely or you've just been living in a non-Christian way and someone will say but I thought you were a Christian and in that sense you can be ashamed because you're ashamed of really the example that you've given but I think we can also be ashamed simply because we're embarrassed we're ashamed to confess

Jesus Christ, it's easy to do in church and it's easy to do with Christian people but we're a bit ashamed of it when we're with our non-Christian friends we're ashamed to bring up the fact that we're Christians, we're ashamed to mention it and when the opportunity does come we've become expert at burying it that was close and we only had to mention the fact that I'm a Christian but I managed to escape and get out of that situation quite quickly because we're ashamed of Jesus Christ in our the company of our unbelieving friends maybe a shame, maybe I'm bad afraid that we'll lose our friends afraid that we'll be laughed at or mocked or just afraid that we'll be exposed for not really being able to testify to our faith or they'll think we're weird and I think that's again a particular challenge maybe to the younger Christians because it's so important to be popular isn't it, so important to have get on well with your peers and there can be a great peer none of your friends are Christians, it can be very difficult but Christ encourages us not to be ashamed of our Saviour not to be ashamed, He'll take us through don't worry and your friends will respect you and more than that

God's put you among your friends because He loves you and He loves them and He wants you to share the Gospel with them and sometimes the other shame we can be is we can be ashamed of other Christians when we're with them and maybe we meet our unbelieving friends we would be a bit ashamed to admit that well, there are Christian brothers and sisters that we go to church with or you know, I've seen it sometimes, you get it sometimes as a minister when people who you know and who are Christians meet you in the street and they're with some of their other friends and Christians and you can just see they're very embarrassed about the fact that they've met the minister in the street with their friends so they just say, oh this is Derek and you know that they don't really want to give on the fact that this is their minister understandably or that you know, this is a Christian and because all of a sudden it'll open a whole can of worms you go to church why do you go to church?

and so there can be a shame in our fellow Christians as Paul encourages Timothy not to be ashamed of Him Christ's prisoner so these are five truths from God's word that challenge us I think about our sharing of faith share it internally share it because it's our commission be prepared to share it, be passionate in sharing it and share it without shame and seek God's protection I'm going to pray briefly and just then finish, okay? I know we've gone on but I just want to finish briefly with two overarching principles, very briefly so let's pray briefly Heavenly Father, we pray that you would teach us your ways you teach us your truth that your Holy Spirit would take what might just be a dry and dull sermon and liven it by your spirit into something that's real for us and convicting to us and is a living word from God from His truth to us, may we all sense your emphasis for each of us in our lives and what we need to repent of, what we need to be confessing to you and what we need to be encouraged by in terms of the fact that you give us a spirit of power and of loving of self-discipline and we can go forward and not be ashamed because of who you are and what you've done and know that you will honour that and will bless that and we pray that that will be the case in our lives, so enliven our time together and as we read about that we would encourage one another through speaking in Sam's hymns and spiritual songs on the word and also singing and making music in our heart, may we do so and may that breathe life into our parting, Sam of praise also

Amen so just to finish, two overarching principles hopefully and we've looked at this quite recently in our series on the Ten Commandments the new commandment that comes from God a new commandment I give you, love one another as I have loved you so you must love one another, by this listen, by this all men will know that you're my disciples if you love one another so as the overarching principle of sharing our faith the biggest one is that we love one another as believers with the grace of Christ, that's the greatest testimony and the challenge of course is does the world see that we love one another and do we love one another these are the two great challenges from that text that we're reminded of, so the greatest way of sharing our faith is not to be a bold, street preacher not even to be a missionary but to be a sacrificially loving church who are committed and wholehearted in loving one another, a Christian community in the world so that we're living beyond

[34 : 01] Sunday and we're living beyond the church service and we recognize that Christ has drawn us together in order to love one another because it's the strongest possible testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ and that's the challenge for us not to be isolationist and not to be in the church what we see very often from our sinful hearts in community which is division and backbiting and pride and jealousy and gossiping and cliques and hatred and talking behind people's backs and not caring about others so we find this great challenge to us here in St. Columbus in the congregation a challenge for us all to have this tremendous spiritual love that fills all the injunctions of the New Testament, fills every aspect of the New Testament and that we display that together as a people

I believe God's brought us together as a people and I'm hoping that the new people who have come today to the city and are worshipping with us will join in our community and feel a sense of God calling us not just to live our Christian lives and go to church now and then but to be committed to the community to the learning, worshipping, living community that we're seeking to develop in St. Columbus so that is one overarching principle and I hope that if you have any questions you're noting them down on the notes and we can discuss these things further on Wednesday and lastly the other central to be overriding principle of sharing our faith is that we do everything to the glory of God 1 Corinthians 10 and this is in the context of arguing for Christian freedom so whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God that's a great verse, I remember my dad used to quote that verse a lot whether you eat or drink or you used to quote it in prayer do it all to the glory of God everything that we do holistic if you want to use a modern non-biblical word holistic Christian living is that we don't compartmentalize our faith to the one hour of church or the small time of prayer or whatever however else we might choose to compartmentalize it we've been saved not just our souls but body and soul we've been saved as people we've been saved as individuals saved as unique characters and that is we are to give back in terms of sharing our faith give back our lives to God and everything we are to do is to be for His glory every part of your life and every part of mine our leisure our relationships our purity our use of time our ethics our sport our music how we serve how we obey all that we are is to be for the glory of God our work our stat- you know everything we are to do it with the view of doing it for Christ to the glory of God that will make us both cool and godly so because it will make us wholehearted and it will make us live life to the full we can never do it unless we recognize this principle and that we share our faith accordingly that we've followed Paul's injunction of Ephesians 5 to set apart Christ as Lord

He's Lord He's not just Lord of Sunday He's not just Lord when other people are watching He's Lord when we feel grumpy and He's Lord when we feel sick and He's Lord when we don't want to go to work and He's Lord of every single atom of our life and of our being and we are God-centered in all that we do God through and through because God lives in us by His Spirit as Christians that's what we believe and through Him to humbly and dependently and obediently, sir I don't want anyone to live their Christian life in two camps I don't want us to have one foot in the world and one foot kind of dangling over the precipice of faith I want us to be wholehearted for Christ and that is a challenge for the oldest Christian here as well as the youngest for the professional preacher as it is for the new babe in Christ the challenge for us is to give Him all and go on that adventure and go on that journey with Him by faith and allow Him to lead us and guide us and help us to rejoice

Too much moderation too much lukewarmness it's time to live our lives for Him individually, uniquely, boldly, courageously humbly, childlikely for Christ let us go forward in that strength and share our faith and please, let's share our faith together let us be bold and confident enough to share Jesus Christ not church politics not denominationalism but share Christ with each other and that will embolden us I think to share faith with others too.