

John1:35-46 The discipline of witnessing

Introduction

We live in a world of bad news so much that is wrong with the economy, the cost of living, moral decay and an increasing absence of agreed standards in the public arena. In our own country there has been more than a 160% increase in users of foodbanks to make ends meet according to the latest Trussel Trust report. In the wider world the news from Syria just gets worse and worse and risks becoming a wider crisis if the obsessive policies of certain Western Governments, including our own, continue in the present direction. Yet not all is bad news, through the work of Trussel Trust around 350,000 households got the food they needed as a result of the donations of churches charities and some other individuals. Through the work of Christians against Poverty 50,000 people or households have become debt free and at least 500 have come to faith in Christ as a result of this ministry through local Christian congregations in the United Kingdom. In our local city the welcome to the Rock Street Chaplains is most encouraging and new opportunities arise fairly regularly to be a Christian presence from the Police and the Bar and Club owners. For an openly Christian organisation to be valued in this way adds visible credibility to the good news we proclaim. Our witness by definition has to be in action not just in words. I praise God for the many practical acts of kindness shown by members of this congregation year on year. Most of them behind the scenes and confidential arrangements, but it is a real joy to me as the pastor to see these demonstrations of practical Christianity. Overseas the mission personnel and agencies we partner with together with the longstanding ventures like Carpathian Aid and its ministries to disadvantaged Romanians and Common Ground the pioneering work amongst the disabled and their families in Romania is yet another witness of which we can be proud. I thank the Lord as one active in the Baptist World Alliance for the collective aid and relief work done around the world, together with the human rights and justice representations made in the name of the 110 million strong world Baptist family of which around half are in unions or conventions formally in fellowship with the BWA. Therefore, instead of focussing just on bad news we have much good news to share and highlight. Praise the Lord for these evidences of the practical application of our Christian principles. However, this although integral to our faith, is inadequate if we stop short of sharing the Lord Jesus with people as the source of our faith and the one whose life, death and resurrection provide the way of salvation for all who put their faith in Him. We are empowered to be His witnesses through the enabling resources of the Holy Spirit given to us by Jesus Himself. The challenge to us is always this: what kind of witness am I for Him? How effective has my witness been this year? And how can I be more effective as a witness in the coming months and years –if the Lord grants me this amount of time.

In John 1 there is a record of the first disciples of Jesus coming both to follow Him together with their first attempts to invite others close to them to follow Jesus as well. What is clear from this passage is that there is more than one way to share our faith and communicate the gospel of God. Here it could be stated that there are four different methods on display.

1. The Preached Word (John 1:35-39)

³⁵ *The next day John was there again with two of his disciples.* ³⁶ *When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, 'Look, the Lamb of God!'* ³⁷ *When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus.* ³⁸ *Turning round, Jesus saw them following and asked, 'What do you want?'* They said, 'Rabbi' (which means 'Teacher'), 'where are you staying?' ³⁹ 'Come,' he replied, 'and you will see.' So they went and saw where he was staying, and they spent that day with him. It was about four in the

afternoon. (a) **An unpopular calling** The apostle Paul in I Corinthians 1:21 stated: *For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know Him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.* In Corinth or Athens the cool way to attract a crowd was the philosophical lecture. Preaching was anything but cool and looked down- 2000 years ago. Times have changed and new phenomena attract the masses for their public entertainment. Cock-fighting and bear-bating are thankfully banned and hopefully soon the brutal sport of bull-baiting in Spain may go the same way. Today it may be the theatre or the cinema, sports facilities or social media websites where large numbers of the general public may be found. However, whatever is 'in' in one generation may not be so favoured a few generations later. What is constant over the generations has been the preaching of God's Word. The numbers of people who responded to the message have varied at different times in history, but God has not changed. The apostle didn't change his message because it was deemed unfashionable. Humanity has never wanted to believe in the seriousness of the problem of sin; humanity never wanted to hear that only through the shedding of the blood of Jesus could they be made whole; humanity has never been thrilled at the gospel of grace to the undeserving. Yet over these centuries God has used ordinary Ministers of the Gospel, together with great evangelists such as George Whitfield and John Wesley in the eighteenth century; D.L. Moody and Asahel Nettleton (USA) in the nineteenth; Billy Graham or Luis Palau in the twentieth centuries to proclaim this gospel pointing people to Jesus. Yet when people visibly respond it is usually the culmination of a process of God at work in their lives. Easter Saturday 1983 a young French man committed his life to Christ after an open air meeting in the market square in Lancaster by members of the National Young Life Campaign, together with evangelist Graham Stamford. On the surface a total stranger responds to Christ after a short time of hearing the Gospel proclaimed. However, God had been speaking in his life for some time. He came to the UK to get away from thoughts about God. On Maudy Thursday he went to London, possibly to Trafalgar Square, but certainly to one of the big squares where a Christian Evangelist was preaching about the cross and a team of others were giving leaflets proclaiming the same message. God challenged Daniel afresh of his need of salvation. He chose to get away from it and on Good Friday went to Leicester. In a public place in the city centre no surprises he came to a place where an Evangelist was preaching the Gospel of salvation in similar terms to the preacher in London. Convicted again he decided to move on and the following morning moved on to Lancaster. Coming down Castle Hill into Market Square he once again heard an Evangelist preaching the same message and this time decided that God was speaking to him and he had to respond by committing his life to Christ. Never forget in your evangelistic witness that we are part of a much bigger team of believers proclaiming the Good News. Your word of witness may be a crucial link in the chain of someone's salvation and you may never know that you played a significant part in someone's conversion.

(b) **Our personal responsibility** Here it was the third day of a momentous week. On Day One (John 1:19-28) the Jewish religious establishment had sent representative to quiz John as to whether he believed he was the Messiah. He gave the expected answer that he was not that person, but the detailed questioning of him in front of his followers must have caused them to think about what kind of person qualified to be the Messiah if it was not John? On the second day (John 1:29-34) the Lord Jesus Himself showed up at one of John's meetings. John 1:29-34 records John's testimony on that occasion: *The next day John saw Jesus coming towards him and said, 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'³⁰ This is the one I meant when I said, "A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me."³¹ I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptising with water was that he might be revealed to Israel.³² Then John gave this testimony: 'I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him.³³ And I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptise with water told*

me, “The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptise with the Holy Spirit.”³⁴ I have seen and I testify that this is God’s Chosen One.’ John was pointing people to Jesus. ‘Look at Him’ –is in essence what preaching is about. His closest disciples are listening carefully and are probably shocked at this pronouncement. After all John the Baptist drew the biggest crowds of thousands of people to his services, whereas this quietly spoken rabbi from Galilee might have as few as twelve disciples with him on a journey. Yet John makes these extraordinary claims about Jesus. He is preparing the way for them in time to leave him and follow Jesus. There was no visible response that day. Instead these men were left with plenty to think about. Your witness and mine at times will do that. Sometimes from a seed of truth being sown to a person’s profession of faith there can be many years of reflection and struggle prior to their conversion. What is at issue here is that John was willing to step out in faith in public and proclaim these truths. Yet it didn’t happen just once John continued faithfully to declare the truth. In John 1:35-36 he repeated the message: *The next day John was there again with two of his disciples.*³⁵ *When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, ‘Look, the Lamb of God!’* We will never know how many times it will take before a friend or family member or work colleague comes to Christ. It may be one more invitation they need –will you be prepared to give it?

(c) **The joy of conversions** Then the response to Jesus in John 1:37-39: *When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus.*³⁸ *Turning round, Jesus saw them following and asked, ‘What do you want?’ They said, ‘Rabbi’ (which means ‘Teacher’), ‘where are you staying?’*³⁹ *‘Come,’ He replied, ‘and you will see.’* There is no joy like that when someone we have prayed for trusts the Lord Jesus. Are you praying for anyone seriously just now? Do you retain a hope and expectancy for this person or these persons coming to Christ? I trust we will. Are you yourself in need of taking this step and following Jesus? Please don’t delay if that is you? Here the emphasis has been on public proclamation of the truth whether one-to-one or in formal meetings. Yet John records a second method of witness here.

2. **The Personal Influence** (John 1:40-42)

⁴⁰ *Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus.*⁴¹ *The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (that is, the Christ).*⁴² *And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, ‘You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas’ (which, when translated, is Peter)* The Gospel is never just for ourselves it is always for other people as well. Those who are nearest and dearest to us also need to hear the good news. (a) **The impulse of a brother’s heart** Andrew was so overcome with the blessings of knowing Jesus that *The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him...* (John 1:41). So often in our evangelistic planning we emphasise reaching person ‘x’ who might walk in unexpectedly ‘from the street’. It is good to be concerned about strangers, but between 80-90% of people who trust the Lord have Christian family members or have a friend or work colleague who is a Christian and who has lived the faith and maybe shared with them about their need of Jesus. Andrew retained this evangelistic heart over the years. In John 6:8 he saw the potential of contacting a boy with a lunch of loaves and small fish. In John 12:20-21 it states: *Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival.*²¹ *They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. ‘Sir,’ they said, ‘we would like to see Jesus.’*²² *Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus.* Andrew and here also Philip another evangelist at heart were always on the lookout for people who needed to meet Jesus. Oh that the Lord might give each of us a heart like Andrew for people. (b) **The message from a brother’s lips** *and tell him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (that is, the Christ)* (John 1:41). I suspect they had had many previous conversations about God and trusting Him, but now was a special moment

when God prompted Andrew to act. Are we open to God's prompting of us to trust Him with our lives and our words and speak a word at the appropriate time for Him? Usually these things take years longer than we would like. Here the response seems very quick but probably this is the last of many encouragements from Andrew about spiritual things. (c) **The reward of a brother's devotion** Simon Peter came to Jesus but had absolutely no idea what Jesus had in store for him. Had this accident-prone fisherman with foot-in-mouth disease got any idea of what following Jesus entailed? Almost certainly not! He was no different from us in that respect. Jesus would work on Peter's rough edges and envisaged him years down the line as a 'rock'. The Lord does the same with each of His spiritual children. He sees us not as we are just now but what by God's grace we can become as we yield our lives to Him and follow by faith. Behind the preacher on the Day of Pentecost was a faithful brother who loved him enough to share Jesus with him. Is there someone on your heart and mind that you love too much to not miss the opportunity to mention Jesus to them? May each of be like Andrew in this regard!

3. **The Direct Appeal** (John 1:43-44)

⁴³ *The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, He said to him, 'Follow me.'*

⁴⁴ *Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida.* (a) **Direct Supernatural Intervention** There are no human intermediaries here. Jesus speaks directly to Philip on the next day of this extraordinary week in the lives of the followers of John the Baptist. Philip had not been seeking Jesus, but Jesus sought and touched Him. There are examples of people being converted this way. A couple of decades ago in Liverpool a pastor recorded the extraordinary story of the conversion of a couple of unchurched people who had come to faith and joined the church he pastored. They had shown no interest in church or in becoming followers of Jesus. It was an ordinary Sunday morning. The husband had asked the wife or told her to purchase the Sunday paper. She was away a long time. God met with her on the way to the paper shop and she ended up in that church where, after the service, she committed her life to Christ. Time had passed and she wondered what on earth he husband would think coming home with Jesus but no Sunday paper! Meanwhile at home the husband had sat down to watch the TV as normal on his Sunday routine. While he was watching television God convicted him of his sin and there in his own lounge with not another person in sight he committed his life to the Lord. Now he wondered what his wife would think when she returned home with the newspaper to a man who had previous shown no interest in God! How I wish it was always so simple, but it isn't. (b) **The use of Visions and Dreams** In North Africa where Islam is overwhelmingly predominant many of the growing numbers of Christians have been converted through visions and dreams of Jesus meeting with them and bringing them to faith. Usually these are people who had never met a Christian and did not know where to find one. There are others who have been converted through access to the gospel on Christian TV or Radio, but that's another story. However, the point here is that God can reach people in the most amazing of ways. He is not restricted to particular methods of evangelism or means of presenting the faith. Be encouraged to keep on praying for people you know who need Jesus but who have no contacts with Christians, that you know of, where they live. God can meet with them in the most remarkable of ways. Jesus called Philip as he was but to an extraordinary calling as a Christian Evangelist in the Early Church. Maybe Philip had no idea of this in those first years of following Jesus, but in time the gifts for that calling became self-evident to all concerned. Remember God deals with each of us as individuals. First this may be true in the manner of our conversion; secondly it may be true in the way He leads us to follow Him as His disciples. The calling you have from the Lord is

unique to you, because God begins working in your life where He finds you but with the intention of transforming you to be like your Lord and Saviour. Be encouraged in your witness and have great expectations of God at work in you and other people for their good and for His glory.

4. The Personal Testimony (John 1:45-46)

⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and told him, 'We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote – Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.' ⁴⁶ 'Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?' Nathanael asked. 'Come and see,' said Philip. (a) **The testimonies of people not yet Christians** Who can be a good witness for the Lord? Anyone! It doesn't have to be a Christian. There are people who will invite others to meetings at church who are unconverted. In my previous church a member when unconverted as a teenager invited a similarly unconverted friend to a special service not so that they might be saved but so as to have someone to talk to and not get bored that evening. God had other ideas and their friend came to Christ. I think of a pastor's daughter who called herself the black sheep of the family because she had no time for church or Christian things. She and her husband had a close friendship with another couple who spent weekends in heavy drinking sessions as their social life. The friend remarked one day that she and her partner wanted to get married but were not sure how to go about it. Her pal said my dad could help you he's a minister. The advice was taken. Soon after a meeting was arranged but her friend quickly became more interested in finding about Christians believed, why they went to church and what a minister did with his time! The wedding duly happened but shortly prior to it the friend committed her life to Christ. It created no small problem over the social life when she wished to spend Sunday mornings in Church rather than in bed with a hangover! I was delighted very recently to have someone who as far as I know doesn't attend any church invite a group of younger people to come along to Broughty Ferry Baptist Church on a Sunday. We serve an amazing God. Who said that only believers could invite others to find out about Jesus? The invitations to Rock Street Chaplains to share faith and be chaplains both outside and inside Night Clubs in Dundee is nothing short of remarkable. Who said God was restricted to using those already Christians to extend His kingdom and fulfil His purposes in the world. (b) **The testimonies of followers of Jesus** Few of us can be public apologists like David Robertson or internationally like William Lane Craig. There are others too who have great ministries in these areas. However, what each of us does have as Christians is our own story. No-one can deny the fact of what God has done in your life. John tells us of Philip sharing his testimony in John 1:45-46: ⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and told him, 'We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote – Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.' ⁴⁶ 'Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?' Nathanael asked. '**Come and see,**' said Philip. Our calling is not complicated it is to pass on what we have received. What the other person does with the good news is their responsibility. Too often we underestimate what difference a few words can make –are you willing to be open to the Lord using you this week, this month, this year? Thank God for the openness of John the Baptist and his disciples 2,000 years ago. Fast forward to today the calling is given to you and to me –may we be found faithful in passing on the good news to other people, for Jesus' sake, Amen.