

How to Witness (9): To Be a Witness, Be God's Ambassador

Sermon – March 26, 2023

Scriptures: Isaiah 42:1-8 & John 4:19-24

Golden Verse: *God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.* - John 4:24

Dear Beloved,

For weeks now, we have been focusing on a very famous story of the Bible—the Lord Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well. This woman came to the well at noon hour, to avoid meeting others. Because of her behaviour, she was neglected, marginalized and probably hated. I am sure she had moments when she was not happy with herself and she made decisions to change herself.

Today, our main question is: Is it possible to change a person's personality? If someone wants to be a different person, can they change themselves? If they can, then how?

Once, there was a conference about this topic. Participants came from different backgrounds and had quite a lively debate on this topic as they had different opinions. At the beginning of the discussion, parents and educators started to complain about the fact that, these days, it is more and more difficult to deal with young people. They are not interested in anything. Most of them are disrespectful, and nobody can coordinate them. They cannot have an impact on their hearts, nor on their way of thinking. One person made a short comment saying that this is his own problem as well. He wants to change but he cannot. He tried many times, but he had many relapses, and now he had given up on changing.

People started to bring up different proposals, saying: ignorance is causing all these problems; people don't know how to behave and we have to teach them with more severity; people are not familiar with the 10 Commandments, with God and with God's expectations. It seems that only teaching people what is right and what is wrong won't make them good people. Another teacher said: it is not enough only to teach, but also to educate. The pedagogy can be beautiful.

Somebody opposed, saying that education is not enough, because the genes determine everything. Somebody said that with self-control you can achieve great results.

Then, another person came along, suggesting that meditation and some different trainings are redemption. An enthusiastic young person said that the positive way of thinking and positive imagination can change everything. He suggested that we just have to focus very hard of what we want to achieve plus the way we want to achieve it, and we will get it. So, I have to imagine that I am beautiful, smart, rich, and successful, and then I will be. This is the solution, he said. Do you think he was right?

Then another person stood up, saying: We are Christians. Only God, by His grace, could help us to change. But God will give His grace only to those who will try very hard to change themselves.

Most participants seemed to like this suggestion and they started to analyze it. What does it mean to struggle to change? How can you receive God's grace? How much do we have to pray? What is enough and what is too much? How can you know if you prayed enough for something?

Somebody was very pessimistic, saying: If somebody was born with a bad personality and a bad nature, not even God can change him.

Another pessimistic person said that we should not believe that we can change ourselves because we are sinners and weak. But we have to believe that God is good and He can forgive our mistakes. We can try our best and sometimes we win, sometimes we lose. He said that, according to his way of thinking, as we are getting older we will sin less and less. After this comment, an elderly gentleman stood up saying: I don't experience this in the retirement home, where I live.

Finally, someone who listened carefully and thoughtfully during the whole conversation said: I am telling you honestly that, for a long time, I tried to change. If I found a church with open doors, I went in to pray, but I was not able to change. If I made some great result, I always relapsed. Then I was a hypocrite and I pretended that I changed, but in reality I did not. For this, I am very disappointed. I

gave up trying to change myself or to pray. Sometimes, my conscience is accusing me but I have learned how to silence it.

After this honest disclosure, everybody became silent. People were digesting what they just heard. Then, a minister broke the silence, asking if there was anybody who could report that they know somebody who was able to change permanently or changed somebody? There was a deep silence again.

Then, the minister continued quietly with a deep humbleness, saying: I know people who struggled a lot with their personalities, and they were able to make visible and spectacular changes. They got rid of the alcohol, they fixed their marital problems, and their children loved and enjoyed them again. These were not temporary but lasting changes. This change always coincided with the fact that these people met Jesus Christ in a **very personal way**. These people took seriously what the Bible says about Jesus Christ. They understood that Jesus came into this world to give us a fully happy and joyful life. He came to take our sin upon His shoulder, and He died for us on the cross. Because of Him, all our sins are forgiven. When they recognized their sin and laid their lives upon Jesus, their lives have been changed.

People who met them confessed, saying: You are a different person. And this was true. Then step by step, they changed their vocabulary, their behaviours, their temper, their interactions, and their work morale. Everything had been changed in their behaviour, because something in their hearts and in their heads had been changed, just because they understood what Jesus Christ has done for them and just because they allowed Jesus Christ to be their Lord and Saviour. After they accepted Jesus in their lives, Jesus Christ started to grow in them, and Jesus helped to make changes.

This is how the Holy Spirit works in those who accepted Jesus Christ in their lives. Jesus Christ allows us to get access to His power. Those who accepted Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, will do His work. The Bible tells us that, even though we try seriously to change our lives, we don't have enough wisdom and power to change. God has to intervene, and He can change us completely. Jesus is offering this great opportunity.

Jesus Christ helped this woman at the well and wants to help us to be better. He is the only one who can create a new life in us. The new life will come, not through development, education, and teaching, but through the word of Creator God. God will not fix the old one but will create a new one, and we will have the nature of Jesus. Let us embrace Him today again. Amen