**Love’s Testimony**

**First Baptist Church, Albemarle**

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The word *testimony* sometimes brings fear into Christians. The heart begins to race, palms begin to sweat and mouths begin to dry out. Do I have to share my testimony? How do I share it? What if I mess up? What if I don’t say the right words and someone doesn’t accept Christ into their heart?

Testimony has several different variations of meanings depending on the circumstances. In case of a courtroom, a testimony is a formal written or spoken statement testifying to what one knows or saw as evidence for the prosecutor or defendant. Testimony can also mean evidence or proof provided by the existence or appearance of something. For example, loss of weight can be a testimony of a change to a healthier lifestyle. Finally, testimony can be a public recounting of a religious conversion or experience.

Many of us find it difficult to share our testimonies of how we encountered Jesus, surrendered to his authority and how we have been transformed. Some of us have quiet personalities that make it hard to share something personal like our testimony. Many of us worry too much about what others would think of us if we shared our experiences with Jesus. We don’t want to be labeled a Jesus Freak! Some of us just want to keep our spiritual lives private and we think that it is not anyone’s business how Christ has transformed us. So we hold on to verses like, “Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good DEEDS and glorify your Father in heaven,” and set aside verses like “Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven.”

So what do we do with what John says in today’s text? What does John mean when he says, “We accept man’s testimony, but God’s testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son?” John says that God’s testimony is that those who believe in his Son, Jesus Christ, has eternal life God’s testimony is found in the person of Jesus and in his life, death and resurrection. N.T. Wright puts it this way: “God has given this witness, by his spirit to make the point that the world has indeed been overcome. No other god, no other power, no other being in all the world loves like this, gives like this, dies like this. All others win victories by fighting; this one, by suffering. All other gods exercise power by killing; this one, by dying.” What powerful testimony!

But when John says “we accept man’s testimony,” he is also telling us that we can’t overlook the power and authority of our own stories. Throughout 1 John, John is reminding the Christians in Ephesus about who Jesus is and what Jesus did for the sake of humanity. Because of Jesus, we are to love one another and be obedient to Christ’s teachings. John was a first-hand witness of Jesus. He was the beloved of Jesus and the one who Jesus left to care for his mother Mary. If anyone can testify to the life, death and the resurrection of Christ, it is John and he is telling us that our testimony is powerful, no matter the story, because it should always point people to God’s testimony in Jesus, a testimony of God’s love for humanity.

As Christians, we need to know our own testimony. We should not be ashamed because our stories are not sensational as someone who had been living in the pit of Hell until Jesus literally pulled them out of the mess they had created for themselves through poor choices. If that is not our story, we should be thankful and boldly share the story of God’s goodness and grace upon our lives.

My salvation story is a testimony of God’s love and grace. At a time when I was struggling with who I was and who I was going to become as a person, God intervened through the person of Albert Long. As a sophomore in high school, I was searching for meaning in my life. I struggled with relationships at home and I was looking for my identity in my own accomplishments in sports and in the classroom. However, I always felt I was missing something. Though I had grown up going to church and had even professed my faith in Jesus through baptism, I had not fully surrendered my life to him.

In the fall of my 10th grade year, an evangelist named Albert Long came to Sanford and held a revival at the high school auditorium. Earlier in the day, he had shared a motivational speech during a school assembly and caught my attention. Though he went to the school I refuse to mention from the pulpit, I was impressed by the fact that he lettered in four different sports in college: football, basketball, baseball and track. So after soccer practice, I went to the revival and heard God clearly say through Albert Long that He loved me regardless of what I achieve in the classroom or on the athletic fields. I realized that my identity is not what I achieve but rather in my relationship with Jesus. I remember the emotions that I felt that night and the burden that was lifted from me.

That was the turning point but I have been working out my salvation since then. I became a leader in my youth group, went off to college and continued to seek ways to experience God and grow in discipleship. I served God through mission trips, summer ministry experiences and ultimately on staff as a part-time youth minister at Knightdale Baptist Church near Raleigh. Deep down inside, I knew that God was calling me into full-time ministry but I wanted to chase after my dream of teaching and coaching until I could not hold out any longer.

So what is your testimony? How did you encounter God? What led you to the point of surrender in your life? For some, it was a singular moment in time when you made that commitment. For others, it was a gradual acceptance of God’s grace and surrender. Through faithful teachings and guidance of a loving church, you’ve learned to love God and give your life to Him. Either way, God has transformed your life and you are committed to living life committed to loving God and loving others.

Not only do we need to know our testimony of how we surrendered to God and accepted his free gift of salvation, we need to understand that we live out our testimony everyday of our lives. Your parents probably reminded you as you were going out on Friday or Saturday night, “Remember who you are and whose you are.” Our testimony is more than just our conversion experience. Our testimony is the continual transformation being lived out every day of our lives.

Our daily testimony or our personal witness is the reflection of Christ in our lives. Theologian James A. Fowler describes the indwelling of Christ in our lives as *Christ in us, Christ as us and Christ through us*. First, Christ is in us through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Romans 8:10-11 says, “If Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.”

Second, *Christ as us* refers to the fact that when we receive salvation, we are a new creation. Jesus becomes the basis of our spiritual identity as his apprentice. So as we take on our identity in Christ and we learn to be more like him everyday. We try to model our lives after Jesus and follow his commands. We take on his yoke as we talked about last week.

Finally, *Christ through us* is the outward expression of our inner relationship with Jesus. In practical terms, it is the fruit of the Spirit that should exude from our thoughts, words and actions: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. We are to display the character that Jesus displayed. But not only is the character of Christ expressed in our behavior by the “fruit of the Spirit,” but we also perform the ministry of Christ through the “gifts of the Spirit.” Our spiritual gifts are to be used to build up the Body of Christ as an act of Jesus working through us.

Christ in us, Christ as us, and Christ through us are reminders that our testimony is something that we show to the world everyday. So when others see us, what kind of Christ do they see? Our testimony should always reflect God’s testimony of love through Christ. May our testimony always shine the light on the cross and the sacrificial love of Jesus. May others see Christ in us, Christ as us and Christ through us. May others always experience love through God’s testimony that is greater than our testimony.