

TESTIMONY AND EXPERIENCE

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A SERMON
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“And many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him for the saying of the woman, which testified, He told me all that I ever did. So when the Samaritans were come unto him, they besought him that he would tarry with them: and he abode there two days. And many more believed because of his own word; and said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of your saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.”
John 4:39-42.

THE most important question concerning any man living is this, is he a saved soul or no? It is of comparatively little consequence whether he be rich or poor, educated or uneducated, compared with this, is he among the living before God or is he dead in sins? Is he pardoned or unpardoned? Is he a child of God or an heir of wrath? Is he walking in the darkness or has he passed into light? Hence of all the days of a man's history the most important is the day in which he is born again. If the man be indeed saved, and a new man in Christ Jesus, he will look back upon the day of his regeneration as his chief birthday. His new birth is second in order of time, but he will always put it first in importance.

His birth gave him his being, but his new birth secured his well being. Being born first we might have descended into hell, but being born a second time we are secured for heaven. If we were to observe those days with the greatest festivity which deserved best to be commemorated, we would certainly make high days and holidays of the days in which we looked to Jesus, and “found in him our star, our sun.” For this reason the circumstances which surround our new birth are to us among the most deeply interesting incidents of our own or any other human history.

The details may be very simple, they may not suffice to make a biography, but still, to us, they are most important. We delight to think of the place where Jesus met with us, the providence which brought us to the spot where we first heard the words which convicted us of sin, we feel pleasure in remembering every detail of our sorrows when we were seeking rest and finding none, and we are charmed as our eye reads in our diary the story of how it was that we found the way of salvation, how it was that we looked to Jesus and lost our burden in a moment, our memory lingers and our heart loves to remember where it was, and by whose lip it was, that the life-giving message came, and we looked to the Crucified One and were lightened. This is the reason why this chapter is so interesting, because it is the story of a conversion, the registry of a new birth, the record of salvation.

It is the story of the conversion of a remarkable woman, great in sin and afterwards great in zeal, it tells us how the work was effected, what was said to her by the Lord, how she replied, what she felt, and how she was brought out into light. This fourth chapter of the Gospel of John has in it not only that touch of nature which makes the whole world kin, but that touch of grace which creates sympathy in all regenerate hearts, and consequently, it will always remain one of the most interesting portions of holy writ. But it is not for itself alone that I shall conduct your minds to this suggestive history. While I shall be talking of this woman, my earnest desire is to feel in my own soul whatever of truth is uttered, and that each one here may be putting every truth to himself in the form of searching questions, saying concerning each thought now uttered, “Do I understand that truth? Am I partaker of that grace?” Thus, our hearing will be profitable, by the blessing of the Holy Spirit, and the woman of Samaria will become a prophetess to us also.

First, then, our text most naturally suggests the remark that *testimony is frequently the means of creating faith*. “Many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman which testified, he told me all that ever I did.” But secondly, *where personal testimony fails, faith may yet arise*, apart from human witness, for “many more believed because of his own word.” Then, thirdly, *even where faith has been begotten through testimony, personal experience very soon eclipses all human witness*. “Now we believe,” they said, “not because of your saying, for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.”

I. The first doctrine this morning is that HUMAN TESTIMONY IS FREQUENTLY MADE THE MEANS OF PRODUCING FAITH IN MEN’S HEARTS.

That is evident to all. Hundreds of instances in proof thereof are present here this morning. A very large number of us owe our conversion to God to the personal testimony of others, who told us what the Lord had done for them, told us in words, but also showed us in their actions, for we perceived the change that was in them, we saw their calm mind under trouble, we remarked their general happiness, we noticed and we admired their holiness, and we were led, both by their verbal and practical testimony, to seek a Savior. This is the more usual mode of divine operation than the testimony of one renewed soul should be blessed to another, and so the kingdom of Christ should be propagated in men’s hearts.

To encourage all here who know the Lord to bear testimony for Him, let us notice the case before us. It was that of *a woman*. Paul’s preaching is very plain upon the subject of female preaching. He does not suffer a woman to preach, but this by no means bars her from bearing testimony in her own way, and she can so bear it as to do God’s work quite as effectually as if she usurped the pulpit. A woman was the founder of the church in Samaria, which was afterwards multiplied by Christ’s teaching, which continued till the time of Philip, and was then in a state of gracious revival. The first person baptized in Europe was a woman, therefore let none of our sisters exempt themselves from bearing witness for Jesus Christ, neither let them think that their witness is unimportant. God will put high honor upon it if it is rendered in simple faith in Him, and perhaps, where public ministry may have failed, their private testimony may yet succeed.

Again, the testimony was not only that of a woman, but of *a sinful woman*, one who would usually be condemned to silence by the customs of society. She had lost her character. It was fittest for her to be quiet. How could she be expected to be a witness for holiness whose life had been unholiness? How could she bear witness to the pure Savior who had been herself impure? It is best for the unchaste to be little seen and never heard. The objection would have been unanswerable had not the woman been changed in character. She was washed, she was sanctified, and renewed, and now the very life which had else been so just a cause for silence became an impelling motive for witness-bearing, since she loved much because much had been forgiven. In her own person she was a notable proof of the Savior’s power to pardon and reclaim. She had become a saint who formerly had been one of the chief of sinners, and her witness for Christ was all the weightier.

If any of you shall have been up till now, great offenders against God, this is no reason why you should not come to Jesus at once, and seek and find mercy, and after you have come to Him, your past transgressions shall be no bar to your future usefulness, on the contrary, you shall the more zealously and powerfully declare the power of His grace. The more mischief we have done in the past the more good we should try to do in the future, that by any means we may undo the evil we have done. How often has it turned out that the chief of sinners, like Paul, have become not a whit behind the very chief of the apostles, and the very force of character which made them ringleaders in evil has aided in bringing them to the front as captains of the Lord’s host. We ought to be thankful, therefore, that we are allowed to bear testimony, and that our testimony may be useful, even though much of our past life has been such that we would wish to blot it out forever.

Observe that this woman’s testimony was *personal*, and there was the secret of its power. She said, “Come, see a man who told *me* all things that I ever did: is not this the Christ?” Now, suppose that she had said, “Come, see a man who has opened up to me the prophecies.” Why they would have said,

“Prophecies! What have you to do with prophecies? Go and fetch your water pot, attend to your business, mend your character, and do not talk to us about prophecies.” Or, if she had said, “I find by reference to the words of Rabbi Simeon that the Messiah is to be very like a person in whom I have just now seen sitting on the well.” They would have cared very little for the Rabbi, or for her inference from his works. It was not because of any learning in what she said that they were convinced, but the personality of her declaration puzzled them.

Now, we make a mistake, I believe, when we assail men’s consciences with quotations from the fathers, and passages from the reformed divines. Human hearts will not be conquered by such poor artillery, and if we think that explaining a doctrine will suffice to win most men to Christ, we labor under a mistake. But this woman did far better than that. She did as good as say, “You know what I have been, all of you, it is of no use for me to attempt concealing it, but I went to draw water at the well, and there sat a stranger there, a Jew, and though He could not have known anything about me by report, yet He directed a question to me which led me to discourse upon my character, and then He told me in detail all that I had ever been, and mentioned some facts which *you* do not know, and which I had forgotten myself. Surely, He must be the Messiah.”

They were very startled as they heard the woman’s tale. How startled she was herself! How surprised she appeared! They listened to her eagerly, wondering much that she should talk of holy things. And, let me say, beloved, if we wish to win souls to Christ, there is nothing like telling to others what the Lord has done for our souls. It is of small use to tell them what we have learned in books, we must declare what God has written on our hearts. It is not describing what was said by the preacher, but what has been felt in our souls. Many a husband has been won to God by his wife’s witness to the power of religion in her own soul, and many a child has been brought to the Savior’s feet by the father’s speaking to him of what grace had done for him. Publish, then, your personal testimony, each of you, for this is the most effectual weapon for overcoming human unbelief and bringing men to Christ.

But then, you will note that the woman’s personal testimony was delivered *very earnestly*. In the first place she had left her water pot, which was not only left for Christ to use, but much more likely because she was absorbed in the purpose to tell others what she had learned, and she was so full of her message that she left the water pot behind. The men would notice that it was so, they would observe the hurried way in which she came back from the well, and above all, they would see the way in which her eyes shone, the manner in which every muscle of her body bespoke the excitement under which she labored. She said, “Come, come, see, see, a man that told me all things ever I did.”

How much depends in bearing testimony upon the way in which it is done. If our sermons were to hang like icicles around our lips, they would not be very likely to melt the ice in your minds, and if, in speaking to your Sunday school class, your words fall like snow, they are not very likely to make children’s hearts burn within them. If, in speaking privately to an individual, you treat your own conversion as though it were a commonplace affair, or aim at his conversion whom you address as though it were a matter that did not much signify, you might as well be silent.

O sirs, you waste your breath, you lose your time. No good will come of it. Your testimony must be earnest, or it will be fruitless. There must be passion and there must be pathos. The soul must run over at the mouth, and the speech must be the outflowing lava of a heart that swells and heaves with inward fires.

I would have you notice the *judiciousness* of the woman’s testimony. It is very striking. She did not say, “Come, see a man that told me all things that ever I did: *I am sure he is the Christ.*” She was too wise to be peremptory. If you positively assert a thing it is very likely that somebody will deny it. There is a propensity in many minds to question inferences drawn by others, though they would draw those very inferences themselves if let alone. So, though she did not doubt that it was the Christ, yet she did not say it is, but she deferred to the self-assumed wisdom of the men, and she said to them, “Is not this the Christ? Don’t you think it is?” as though she would have her belief confirmed by their judgment, and humbly requested them to come and see. This is a kind of Pauline taking them by guile, a method which

is commendable because there is no sinful guile in it, it is all plain, innocent guile enough. She knew something about human nature from herself, and judging the men by herself, she did not dogmatize, but she put it in such a way that she knew what answer they must give to her question, "Is not this the Christ?"

In fishing for the souls of men you need as much judgment as you do in angling, for men are curious fish, and they will often be frightened by a shadow, and in the very way of throwing the line and managing the fly, there is an art not very readily learned. Some never learn the way, and are never able to attract souls, while others are endowed with sacred instincts by which they know how to handle men's hearts and win power over them. We must be wise to win souls, souls are not won by fools. We must have a sympathy with men, even reaching to their infirmities, and we must woo them as men, dealing with them not as they ought to be, but as they are, and putting the truth in the shape in which it is likely to be acceptable to them.

David chose out a smooth stone from the brook, he knew what sort of stone he could sling best, what sort of a stone was suited to his sling, what stone was best adapted to Goliath's forehead, and he sent the right stone in the right way. And so must you. If you bear witness for Christ, ask the Spirit of wisdom to guide you. Pray to be directed lest your earnestness should lead you into an injudicious mode of speech. Let prudence be mingled with your zeal. He is the Christ, but if you want men to believe that He is, you will sometimes do better to ask men if He is than actually to assert His claims. The woman bore her testimony, and bore it well.

Now, observe the result. There were *many that believed* on Christ at once, because of the woman's speech. Happy woman, thus to become a mother in Israel. Blessed testimony, which was thus fruitful on the spot a hundred-fold. I warrant you that many a bishop and doctor of divinity, and many a mighty orator, has spoken hundreds of times with less result than this poor untrained, unordained, female apostle of Jesus Christ. Her simple talk did more than eloquence could accomplish, though it should be as mighty as that of Cicero or Demosthenes. Her heart was in the words she spoke. Her speech was simple, there was nothing to recommend it of beauty of verbiage, or gaudiness of oratory. She said what she did know, and testified what she had seen, with an earnest desire that others should know and see what she had learned. Therefore God blessed her.

Oh, may God bless many of us, whether men or women, to the selfsame end, the bringing of many to Jesus. Those who were not converted under her were awakened and stirred up, so that they went to see the Lord Jesus, and brought Him into their city, and asked Him to stop with them, and many of these were afterwards converted, so that she became in some sense the instrument of their salvation. Would to God that each one of us aimed at the same thing.

But, I have more practical work to do than this. I have a question to put to many here who have not believed in Jesus. Your not believing in Jesus, many of you, does not arise from want of testimony about Him. The Samaritans only heard the testimony of a woman of very doubtful character, but they believed in Jesus Christ through it. I want to speak very pointedly to some here. You have heard the testimony of the best people who have ever lived, and yet you have not believed. Had you not the testimony of a mother who loved the Savior and loved you, and above all things in this world coveted that you should love her Savior too? You know how earnestly she has spoken to you with as many tears as words, and how often she has backed her testimony with her prayers, but you have not believed. She told you that Jesus could pardon sin, could give rest to your conscience, and could preserve you unto His eternal kingdom and glory, and she besought you to come to Him, but you did not come. In her case there was a good character to back her testimony. You saw year after year her quiet, patient, godly life, and what is more, it may be I speak to some who saw the triumphant death of that same mother, and yet you have not believed.

I have seen death beds which I have thought would have been enough to have convinced the most hardened, for there has been about the dying saint conclusive evidence of the power of divine grace. The body has been pained, but the soul has been placid. Storms have swept through every nerve, and yet

perfect peace has ruled the spirit, ay, and more than peace, for the soul has rejoiced with joy unspeakable and full of glory. That is an unbelieving heart indeed which will not be convinced by the testimony of a near and dear one, a testimony supported throughout a holy life and crowned by a glorious death. There are husbands here, probably, whose wives always bear good witness for Christ. Your wife is not dead, and you know very well, in the bottom of your heart, that religion has done great things for her, and if she were to die, you would feel deep regrets for the ridicule you sometimes pour upon her. Why, if I were not this day a believer in Christ, I think I should be of all men the most incorrigible, for I have seen the fruits of grace in a beloved mother, and in a gracious father. I could not be so base as to doubt their truthfulness, and yet I must do so or else accept their witness for the Lord Jesus.

Did I not believe in the depravity of the human heart, I should wonder how so many can reject the pious testimonies which everywhere surround them, testimonies of persons of the most honorable character, who, on any other matter, would be at once believed. Peradventure there may be some here who will say, "I do not know that I have ever had any testimony of the sort borne to me." Now, if you will allow me, you shall not be able to say that any longer. I will bear my testimony for Jesus Christ at once. When I preach Christ and His salvation to you I do not preach what I learned in a college or was taught by men, I preach to you what I would die for, what is the chief joy of my soul, what I know and believe and have experienced.

Years ago I was under the greatest conceivable darkness of spirit. I was but a lad, but my sin haunted me. I had such an idea of the guilt of my past life that my heart was heavy within me, and at intervals I was crushed down with fear. I would get away into corners and cry and pray, when no one saw me, and I labored under the belief that everybody else might be saved, but that I would perish. Now, I heard of Jesus Christ, that He was able to put away sin at once from any one who simply looked to Him, and trusted Him. I heard that, and I was enabled by divine grace, as soon as I heard it, to trust the Savior. I did there and then rest the whole weight of my soul for time and eternity upon the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth the Son of God, and my witness is that in one single moment, a load was rolled from off my spirit, and as swiftly as a flash of lightning I passed from darkness into light, from misery into joy. From that hour I bless God that, being not exempt from trouble, and especially not free from a tendency to despondency which is always with me, I yet rejoice and will rejoice, and am happy, unspeakably happy in resting upon Jesus Christ.

Moreover, I have found that those points of my character which were most weak have been strengthened, while strong passions have been subdued, propensities have been kept under, and new principles have been implanted. I am changed, I am as different from what I was as a man could be who had been annihilated and had then been made again. Nor do I claim any credit for this—far from it. God has done great things for me, but He has done the same for others, and is willing to do it for any soul that seeks His face. He is willing to do it for every seeker here. There is such a thing as a new heart and a right spirit, I know there is. There is such a thing as perfect happiness in death, ay, and even a longing to depart. I know that peace with God is to be had, for I have felt it and bear witness to it.

Do you reject my witness? Peradventure you doubt my truthfulness. Then I must endure your injustice, for I know that I lie not, but if my character is right, and if you think I speak the truth, then I ask you to receive the witness I bear. I wish I could bear it more judiciously and more earnestly, but I do bear it in all sincerity with this desire in my soul—I would that not only some of you, but all that hear me this day knew the preciousness of Christ Jesus my Lord, and understood that beneath God's heaven there is nothing so blessed as to be resting upon the blood and merits of the once crucified but now exalted Savior. I bear my testimony as the woman from the well did. If you reject it, so must it be, but I pray you do not so, but come and see Jesus for yourselves, for He is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.

II. FAITH MAY ARISE APART FROM THE TESTIMONY OF MEN.

I shall speak of this second head for this reason. When you, who are earnest soul-winners, have borne testimony to any man about Christ, and he does not yield to it, do not despair of him. When you have preached to a man, and he is not converted, do not think that there is no other hope for him. The Lord has other ways of working besides the witness of His servants. Some of those Samaritans who had not received the woman's testimony believed because of His own word. Have we God's own word among us now? Yes, thank God, we have. We have it in the Scriptures. Some there are who will not hear the witness of men, though it be loving and personal, who will yet bow before the majesty and power of the infallible Word of God. Let us hope that those who refuse our persuasions will yield homage to the Word of God. Let us trust that some in quietly reading their Bibles may yet be convicted and converted. If all *our* arrows shall miss them, let us hope that God's Word will yet dart an arrow between the joints of their harness.

Remember, the Spirit of God can work on men's hearts through truths which they heard a long time ago. He will not reveal new truths to anybody, the complete revelation is in the Scriptures, but He will often freshen up old truths in the mind. I have hopes of many men in London who never go to a place of worship, that they will be converted yet, because when they were children they were at a Sunday school, and there they obtained knowledge which the devil will never be able to make them forget. The seed is hidden, but not dead. I have seen in the country men digging a ditch, throwing up the earth from ten or twelve feet deep, and yet in that earth there were strange seeds, long covered with earth, which only wanted unearthing and exposure to rain and sun to develop them to the amazement of the neighborhood, so there may lie seeds of truth deep down in the memory, and God the Holy Spirit may quicken them. We have known persons at their work not thinking of divine things at all, but yet a sudden thoughtfulness has come over them, and they have considered their ways. The Spirit of God, in fact, moved upon them. They began to meditate, and meditating they confessed their sins, and turned to God.

Besides, remember God has many preachers that are not in human flesh. For instance, fever is a terrible Elijah. When the cholera came to London it was a Jonah in our streets. Many then began to think who would have gone blindfold down to perdition. When poverty visits some men's houses, and they can no longer indulge in drunkenness and gluttony, then they think of their Father's house, and the hired servants who have bread enough and to spare. Omnipotence has servants everywhere, God can make use of even the ills of life to work eternal good.

I have even known cases in which sin has been overruled by God to the awakening of souls. I remember a young man whose life had been strictly moral and upright, but who had disregarded all religion. He was a working man, and on one occasion he upset a can of varnish at his work. He was afraid of his master's anger and when asked who did it, he denied the fact. He had never lied before, at least not in such a manner, and he felt himself so mean, so degraded in having told a lie, that he felt himself to be no longer righteous before God, he bowed his knee and confessed his sin, and with a burdened conscience he went to hear the Gospel, and found peace and pardon through the precious blood of Jesus.

Disease within a man may be as dangerous as when it breaks out and throws its pustules through the skin. When the man sees sin in eruption, he only sees what was in him before, it could never come out if it was not first in him. The wrong act could never come forth if it was not in the man, and sometimes, the wrong act has convinced the man that his nature was impure, and so sin though evil in itself has been the means of bringing conviction to the soul. God has many ways of bringing men to Himself, and we should pray that where we fail, the Word of God, accompanied by the power and energy of the divine Spirit may convert them, that they may be saved.

There are persons in the world of a singular disposition, and of a peculiarly independent mind, who do not care to be shown anything, but prefer to find it out for themselves, and the probability is that if you wish them to see they will shut their eyes. The very thing they would find out and rejoice in, they will not learn from you. They keep themselves to themselves and will never be brought in by testimony, but they will be converted, let us hope, by the effectual working of the Spirit. I have known some too

who are of such a skeptical turn of mind, so that testimony is not received by them. They have seen so much of persons being led by the nose by priests, that they will not believe anybody, and whereas some will swallow a lie, these will only with difficulty accept the truth itself from fear of being credulous. They are something like Thomas. Mary Magdalene said she had seen the Savior. "Ah, no doubt you are an excellent woman, but you have certainly been deceived, you are so imaginative." Then Peter said, "I have seen the Lord." "I am sure you think so, but you must be in error." Then John said, "But indeed, I have seen the Lord." "That is good evidence for yourself, but it does not convince me." Then Bartholomew and others would say, "We have seen the Lord, and five or six others have told you so. Do you think we have conspired to tell a falsehood?" "No my brethren, far from it, yet I have known such things in the world as for five or six persons to be mistaken. I feel that your witness deals with such improbabilities that I cannot receive it." At last Thomas declared downright, "Except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe."

Now, this was not right, but at the same time it was so, and our Lord was graciously pleased to yield to the infirmity of Thomas, and He said, "Reach hither your finger, and behold my hands, and reach hither your hand and put it into my side, and be not faithless but believing." Persons of this character make eminent saints when once convinced, and our Lord has in some cases dealt with them in a special way, and where the word of man has failed, His own Word, attended with special power of the Holy Ghost, has brought them to believe.

We must tarry no longer. I only introduce the point by way of encouragement to you who work for Jesus, not by way of sedative to you who will not believe. You have no right to expect you will ever have any other testimony than you have already received. You have Moses and the prophets, if you will not hear them, neither would you be converted though one rose from the dead. You are not to expect miracles to convert you. Christ may go out of His way, but He is not bound to do so, you have no right to look for it. You may say, "Except I see signs and wonders I will not believe," but the probabilities are that you will not see signs and wonders, and will perish in your unbelief. Beware, I pray you.

III. PERSONAL EXPERIENCE ECLIPSES HUMAN TESTIMONY.

The very people who believed through the woman, afterwards said, "Now we believe not because of what your saying, for we have heard him ourselves, and know that he is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world." Personal experience is far *more convincing* than any testimony can be. You may believe a thing because you are credibly informed of it, but you believe it a great deal more deeply and thoroughly when you have seen it for yourself. In the times of famine Jacob was told there was corn in Egypt, and the patriarch believed the word, but when they had gone to Egypt, and had their sacks full, there was a deeper conviction in their minds about Egypt's corn than ever before.

A missionary speaking to the inhabitants of a tropical region, informed them that water in our country, through cold, sometimes became solid. The generality of the natives would not believe him, it was too absurd a thing to be true. One, however, who knew the missionary's character, did believe that water could become solid, so that persons could walk upon it, but when he came to England and saw a river frozen over, his faith was very different from what it had been before. It was the same in essence, but of a deeper degree. So when we heard that Jesus Christ is precious and that He is a Savior, we believed it, but when we were saved by Him, and found peace through Him, we received a far deeper faith.

The faith that is based upon personal experience is *more essential* than any other, for until we have this faith, we cannot know that we are saved. Those doctors who advertise their medicines know that the public depends very much upon testimony, and therefore they generally give us a list of cures, with the names of persons who have been healed. They expect that the readers of such testimonials will look with favor upon their medicine, and I suppose it is so, but if ever you have taken any medicine, and you have yourself been perfectly restored from some very painful and dangerous ailment, your faith in that medicine is quite another thing. Before, you said, "I do not know that all those people live at the

addresses which are given, and perhaps they never lived anywhere,” or, if you really believed that the thing was correct enough, you did not take any interest in it, but after your own disease has been removed by it, you are certain to talk about it to other people and say to them, “You know such and such a medicine, it is wonderful how it acts—perfectly marvelous, the restoration I have received through it!”

Now, it is just so when we come to Jesus. We are so fully convinced that we begin to tell others. But my point is that it is essential, because if I believe in the man’s medicine, and yet do not take it, it is of no use to me, if I believe in Christ’s saving sinners, but do not go to Him to save me, He is nothing to me. If I am in danger at sea and there is a lifeboat, and I believe in her, such faith will not save me, I must get into her; if I am hungry and believe in bread, it will not take away my hunger, I must eat it; if I am dying of thirst and see the crystal spring by my side, it will not save me merely to believe in the water, I must stoop down and drink it for myself. Personal experience is the essential proof, and we must have it.

And let me add, that personal experience is always a *more complete* witness than testimony can ever be. Testimony can tell you something about Christ, but not much compared with what you will learn by going to Him yourself. The Queen of Sheba was told of Solomon that he was wise, that his court was richly furnished, and that his dominion was magnificent, but when she had herself entered the royal presence, her heart failed her, and she said, “The half has not been told me.”

Witnesses about other things exaggerate, but witnesses concerning Jesus Christ always fall short. Painters have frequently won repute by making portraits fairer than the originals, but none can ever paint Jesus with a pencil that shall give too much of luster to His noble face. He is so glorious that even angels who have seen Him all their lives, and bowed before Him where His splendor is best revealed, could not tell man nor one another the thousandth part of His excellences. If you want to know Him you must see Him for yourself. You must make Him your personal acquaintance, you must press by faith into the inner circle, and cry with the spouse, “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, for His love is better than wine.”

This kind of evidence is the *most enduring*. What you receive from another man you might, perhaps, give up. In days of persecution those who believed the Bible second-hand have denied the faith, but those who have had it worked into the warp and woof of their being, who have had their souls dyed and tintured through and through with it, because they have lived upon Christ, and Christ has lived in them—those were the people who stood on the kindling to burn, and learned to sing the high praises of God while their flesh and bones were being consumed. If we want to become stalwart men who cannot be turned aside by every wind of doctrine, whom neither Rationalism nor Sacramentarianism can shake from the Gospel, we must be those who have been with Jesus, and in that way have learned experientially from him, for such experiential Christians can never give up the truth.

Now, to close, I would observe this, that only those who know the Savior experientially can bear testimony to others, for this woman through whose secondary testimony many were converted, had, first of all, a personal experience herself. She said, “He told me all things that ever I did.” If she had not personally learned of Him she could not have gone out and spoken to others. So you who would be useful must get the truth into your own souls by personal feasting upon it. Only that which is in yourself can you communicate to others. Out of an empty bottle nothing comes. The Lord says to you as to Ezekiel, “Eat this roll,” digest in your own soul the doctrine you would preach. Have within yourself a well of living water, and then out of you shall flow rivers for others.

Let me add that while it is a serious thing to reject the personal witness of others, it is a fatal thing to reject this other test of truth, namely, the trying for yourself whether Jesus is what He professes to be. When the offer is made to a man concerning any article of commerce, “This is an excellent production, and here are recommendations given by persons able to judge, but moreover, you can take it home with you, you can try it for a month, and if it does not answer your purpose it will be taken back,” that is always considered to be an honest system of trade.

Now, we say concerning the things of God, if you do not care to take our testimony, do not take it, but do another thing, try the Lord Jesus for yourself. God hears prayer, go and see if He does not. God does accept penitent hearts, and He has regard to contrite spirits, come and see, come and see for yourself—

“There is life in a look at the Crucified One.”

Go and try it, go and try it. If you can prove Jesus Christ to be false, if after having tried Him He rejects you, very well, then it must be so, but there has never been anything of the kind yet. “Him that comes unto me, I will in nowise cast out.” Did He ever cast out one of you? If so, He has broken His word, and that shall never be. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but none of His words shall ever fail. He declares that He is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by Him. Go to God by Him and see. If He does not save you, if it turns out that you are beyond His power, that He cannot save to the uttermost, then tell it, preach the devil’s gospel all the world over, and say the truth however horrible it may be. We challenge you to the test.

If God be God serve Him. If the Gospel be true believe it. If it be a lie don’t come here worshipping, or anywhere else pretending to worship a god you know to be false. Be not such double-faced persons as to say, “We are Christians,” and yet do not worship the Savior. One thing or the other. If the Gospel be true it ought to be accepted, if it be not true, bear your witness honestly like men, and let the world be undeceived. We challenge the trial.

In the name of Him that died and rose from the dead, in the name of ten thousand times ten thousand arrayed in white robes, who have washed them in His precious blood, in the name of the church militant, which is on its way to heaven, we challenge you to the test this day whether Jesus be a Savior or not, and we pray God to lead you to try it, for we know that your conclusion will be—“We have heard Him ourselves, and we know that He is the Christ, the Savior of the world.” May God’s Spirit rest on these words, and may we meet in heaven, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—JOHN 4:1-42.

Taken from The C. H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.