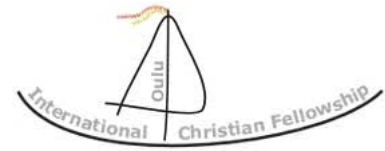


International Christian Fellowship of Oulu Worship Service / Message



Date & Time: Sunday, 22.6.2008 at 16.00

Place: Chapel of St. Luke

Topic: Sharing Faith – Being a Witness and Testifying for Christ

Author: Bastian Fähnrich

Sources: Bible New International Version (www.bibleserver.com), Campus Crusade for Christ International (www.ccci.org), Truth Event Training Session with Leena and Kalevi Lehtinen

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Topic

Sharing Faith – Being a Witness and Testifying for Christ

Reasons and objectives for this message:

- Answering to God's calling to learn more about the Christian faith and, especially, about evangelism, the devoted spreading of the Gospel and its Biblical foundation
- Getting to know each other better as Christian believers or, to share our faith with those that may be seeking for God or need encouragement to pro- and reclaim their faith in Jesus
- Growing as believers by searching the Word of God for what it says about giving testimony of the Christian faith
- Preparing and challenging ourselves as Christian believers to tell the Gospel at the Truth Evangelisation Event (www.yksitotuus.fi/rekry08)
- Strengthening our resolve to engage in evangelical activities, for example, establishing an English-language Information & Cooperation Network of Oulu's Christian Ministries (termed 'Net for a Catch', according to Luke 5:4 and Mark 1:17)
- Commemorating John the Baptist as a witness for Jesus Christ ('Juhannus' or Midsummer Festival)
- Making this message interactive, emphasising the participation of churchgoers and, by joint efforts, realising that evangelism lies at the heart of the Christian faith

Sharing Faith – Being a Witness and Testifying for Christ:

There are many different ways of sharing the Christian faith, which can be divided into an indirect and direct approach. The indirect approach represents the meaning of 'sharing' in fairly broad terms, whereas the direct approach refers more to 'sharing' faith and 'witnessing' or 'testifying' for Jesus in the sense these words are usually associated with among Christian believers:

Indirect approach:

- Sharing faith by simply believing in Christ, or sharing in the common faith in Jesus
- Attending church on Sundays and taking part in other Christian activities
- Living an exemplary life as a Christian believer

Direct approach:

- Confessing our sins to Jesus Christ
- Proclaiming and teaching the Word of God
- Telling the Gospel, Evangelising people by various means
- Giving a personal testimony of faith
- Devising a statement of faith, as our congregation (ICFO) recently did
- Working as missionaries, as Helmuth & Niina and Laura & Minna currently do

Can you think of other examples? Let's gather our suggestions on a flip chart (2 minutes)!

However, in order to witness and testify for Christ, one must meet/have met certain requirements:

Requirements for sharing faith:

- Having become a believer in Christ
- Being filled with and relying on the Holy Spirit
- Confessing sins and repenting
- Preparing oneself in prayers and thanksgiving
- Acknowledging the Biblical foundation for sharing faith in Jesus
- Learning and knowing about the privilege and responsibility of spreading the Gospel
- Thinking of ways of approaching people indirectly or directly, for example, by giving a personal testimony of faith
- Going out and meeting people, either fellow believers or non-believers

Certain aspects of these requirements are explored in more detail as follows:

1. Becoming a believer in Christ

2. Biblical foundation for sharing faith in Jesus

3. Personal testimony and the Holy Spirit's role in witnessing for Christ

Above all, let's remember that sharing faith, as other activities of Christian believers, is not supposed to happen for our own but for God's sake:

Colossians 3:17, 23

Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (...) Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men.

1 Peter 4:11

If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

1. Becoming a believer in Christ

Question: What does one have to know in order to come to faith and start a relationship with God? *Let's think about this and, for example, ask ourselves what we have learned in recent worship services or Bible studies:*

- Worship services: the Bible as the true Word of God, salvation and rebirth in Christ, the nature and works of the Holy Spirit
- Bible studies: godly and ungodly behaviour in the Old and New Testament, earthly and heavenly wisdom according to James, and the Old Testament Proverbs and New Testament parables

Answers: *Let's gather our answers on a flip chart (3-5 minutes)!*

See our answers at the end of this document!

Here is an overview of answers that are usually given, and which have recently been gathered at the Truth Event Training Seminar (Kalevi and Leena Lehtinen), as well as for the purpose of this message, mainly by reference to material from Campus Crusade for Christ International:

- Man is sinful and has been a slave to sin ever since Adam's and Eve's fall
- Man's sins separate him or her from God, without God man is lost
- God is love & has mercy, He wants no-one to perish but to have eternal life & communion with Him
- God stands for justice and righteousness – in His eyes man falls always short of these, unless he/she (re)turns to Him through Jesus Christ
- God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to free man from sin and restore man's relationship with Him
- God sacrifices His Son on behalf of man
- Jesus Christ suffered God's punishment for man's sins on the cross, dies and rises from the death
- Man has to repent and be born again in the truth of Christ
- Man can only be saved and accept Christ into his/her life by grace and faith
- God sent the Holy Spirit to accompany Christian believers
- Christian believers make up the Church, Christ's body, and carry on the Gospel
- Christian believers worship God & grow spiritually through fellowship, praise, prayer, Bible study etc.

Biblical evidence for God's and man's relationship

(may be left out from the message on 22 June)

The following presentation gives an overview of God's and man's relationship based on evidence provided in the Bible. It depicts various states and kinds of relationship between God and man at certain times in history. The presentation begins with the early history of mankind and ends with future events and the eternity revealed to believers and non-believers:

Abundance

Man being created by God, living in Eden and in a perfect relationship with God (**Genesis 1+2**)

Precedence & Dependence

God rules over man, man over creation (**Genesis 1+2**)

Benevolence

God provides everything good for man, He wants no evil to enter mankind (**Genesis 1+2**)

Self-indulgence, Negligence, Indifference, Resistance, Independence & Malevolence

Man's sin towards God, mankind and creation. Satan tempts initially, but man, based on his/her free will submits to evil and becomes a slave of sin (**Genesis 3** onwards, various accounts in both the Old and New Testament)

Sentence & Severance

Consequence of man's sin: man driven out of Eden, man's relationship with God broken and discontinued, as sin continues to take effect and controls man (**Genesis 4:23, 1 Kings 8:46, Romans 3:10-23**)

Appearance

Christ's ministry, Jesus coming into the world (Gospel of **Matthew, Mark, Luke, John** and in the Old Testament, for instance, Isaiah, Malachi etc.)

Benevolence

Christ healing people, gathering disciples, telling the Gospel, and doing the good will of His Father by means of the Holy Spirit (**Gospels**)

Sentence & Severance Pay

Christ sentenced to death on behalf of mankind (**Romans 3:21-31, Ephesians 5:2, Hebrews 9:26**)

Disappearance

Christ descends to 'hell' or the kingdom of the dead (**1 Peter 3:18-20; 4:6**)

Resurgence

Christ rising from death, His resurrection (**Gospels**)

Appearance

Christ appearing to disciples and other witnesses (**Gospels**)

Assurance

Christ assuring his resurrection to disciples and other witnesses (**Gospels**)

Disappearance

Christ ascends to Heaven (**Gospels**)

Presence

God and Christ present through the Holy Spirit, to disciples and believers (**John 14:15-31**)

Acceptance

Man turns his/her life over to Christ by faith, man becoming a believer (**John 13:20, Acts 2:41; 26:8**)

Repentance & Deliverance

Man's sins being forgiven, man being freed from sin, restored before God as a believer through Christ's sacrifice, not by own efforts (**Ephesians 2:8+9**)

Reverence

Man's relation towards God, humility of man as a believer (**James 4:10, 1 Peter 3:8**)

Presence

God and Christ present in a believer's life through the Holy Spirit (**1 Corinthians 2**)

Endurance, Perseverance & Advance

Man living a Christian, Spirit-filled life. Man's spiritual growth, using gifts, doing works of love etc. as a believer (**Romans, James, Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians** etc.)

Appearance

Christ's last coming to judge mankind (**John 12:48, Hebrews 9:27-28, Revelation 20**)

Sentence & Severance

Hell, non-believers will experience eternal division from God (**Revelation 21:8**)

Abundance

Heaven, believers will enter perfect and eternal relationship with God (**John 14:2-4, 1 Thessalonians 4:17, Revelation 7:9-17**)

2. Biblical foundation for sharing faith in Christ:

This part of the message explores the Biblical foundation for sharing the Christian faith as follows:

- **John the Baptist's testimony for Christ**
- **God's testimony – Jesus Christ and the Great Commission**
- **Paul the Apostle's testimony for Christ** (may be left out from the message on 22 June)

John the Baptist's testimony for Christ

A good way to explore what the Bible says about testifying for Christ is to look into the life of John the Baptist. In Finland John the Baptist is commemorated on 21 June at 'Juhannus', or the Midsummer festival, elsewhere in Europe on 24 June. This date relates to the birth of John the Baptist, about half a year before Christ's birth, Christmas. Let's turn to the Bible and see what, for instance, Luke's Gospel reports:

Luke 1

Describes John the Baptist's birth, Mary's visit to Elizabeth, Mary's and Zechariah's song.

For example, Zachariah, in his song, accounts for John the Baptist's role in witnessing for Christ:

Luke 1:76-79

[Zechariah:] You, my child [John the Baptist], will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.

In his song, Zachariah refers to Christ, by means of a metaphor, as the light that will shine on those living in darkness and the shadow of death. Later in this message, we will see that Christ himself affirms this by bringing up this metaphor again. Here Zachariah, however, makes clear that John the Baptist only prepares the way for Christ, testifying about Christ as the light of the world and life. The Scriptures state:

John 1:6-8

There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John [the Baptist]. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

The testimony of John the Baptist led to confusion among the Jews in the times of the New Testament. They confused him, amongst others, with Elijah. Accordingly, John the Baptist had to clarify that his role was merely to prepare Christ's coming. One day John was enquired by a group of Jews on the shores of the river Jordan, where he used to baptise people:

John 1:19-28

Now this was John [the Baptist's] testimony when the Jews of Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, I am not the Christ. They asked him, Then who are you? Are you Elijah? He said, I am not. Are you the Prophet? He answered, No. Finally they said, Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself? John [the Baptist] replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, *I am the voice of one calling in the desert, 'Make straight the way for the Lord.'* Now some Pharisees who had been sent questioned him, Why then do you baptise if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet? I baptise with water, John [the Baptist] replied, but among you stands one you do not know. He is the one who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.

Note that John the Baptist refers to the Old Testament, where Christ's coming and John the Baptist's role is confirmed, for example, through the prophets Isaiah and Malachi:

Isaiah 40:3-5

A voice of one calling: In the desert prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it.

Malachi 3:1

See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come, says the Lord Almighty.

In conclusion, John the Baptist's testimony for Christ is very simple, and it can be summarised as follows in the Gospel of John the Disciple:

John 1:34

I [John the Baptist] have seen and I testify that this [Jesus Christ] is the Son of God.

What about the Son of God? Is it sufficient to rely on John the Baptist's testimony for Jesus? Let's see that God, or Christ, has a testimony to share, which is much more important than any man's witnessing account for Jesus:

God's Testimony – Jesus Christ and the Great Commission

As mentioned in the Gospel of John, Jesus Himself proclaims:

John 5:36

I [Jesus] have testimony weightier than that of John. For the very work that the Father has given me to finish, and which I am doing, testifies that the Father has sent me.

What does Jesus testify for? In short, He serves as the witness of His own ministry, that is, He reveals that He has come into the world for the salvation of mankind. He testifies that He alone brings eternal life, leading man out of the shadow of death:

John 5:24

I [Jesus] tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him [God the Father] who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.

Again, we hear that believing the testimony of Christ is a matter of life or death. Let's see that Jesus makes such a statement also regarding the metaphor used by Zachariah and John the Baptist, that is, Christ Himself as the light of the world and life. It reads in the Scriptures:

John 8:12

I [Jesus] am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

Remember what John the Disciple said about John the Baptist and the metaphor in question:

John 1:6-8

There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John [the Baptist]. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

There is much more to say about Christ's testimony and, especially, about salvation. But for this message the Bible references mentioned here are sufficient. However, with Jesus' return to Heaven on ascension day, the light of the world has not disappeared. On the contrary, Christ points out that the ones that are saved, or the ones that become believers or disciples are called to spread the Gospel and be the light of the world:

Matthew 5:14-16

You [Jesus says to the Disciples] are the light of the world. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

Testifying for Christ by good deeds refers, maybe, more to an indirect approach of sharing the Christian faith, but in His Great Commission, Jesus also commands His disciples and believers to spread the Gospel to all mankind by means of a direct approach:

Mathew 28:18-20

Jesus came to them [the Disciples] and said, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

Luke 24:47-48

Repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in His [Jesus'] name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.

Paul the Apostle's testimony for Christ (may be left out from the message on 22 June)

Paul the Apostle serves as a good example as Christ's disciple and witness. He turned his sinful life over to Jesus and then went on telling the Gospel to both Jews and Gentiles, taking on the Great Commission and following God's calling:

Mark 16:15

Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.

Acts 22:1-21

Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defence. When they heard him speak to them in Aramaic, they became very quiet. Then Paul said: I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. Under Gamaliel I was thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers and was just as zealous for God as any of you are today. I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, as also the high priest and all the Council can testify. I even obtained letters from them to their brothers in Damascus, and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished. About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, 'Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?' 'Who are you, Lord?' I asked. 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting,' he replied. My companions saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of him who was speaking to me. 'What shall I do, Lord?' I asked. 'Get up,' the Lord said, 'and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do.' My companions led me by the hand into Damascus, because the brilliance of the light had blinded me. A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there. He stood beside me and said, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight!' And at that very moment I was able to see him. Then he said: 'The God of our fathers has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. You will be his witness to all men of what you have seen and heard. And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptised and wash your sins away, calling on his name.' When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the temple, I fell into a trance and saw the Lord speaking. 'Quick!' he said to me. 'Leave Jerusalem immediately, because they will not accept your testimony about me.' 'Lord,' I replied, 'these men know that I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believe in you. And when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.' Then the Lord said to me, 'Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'

3. Personal testimony and the Holy Spirit's role in witnessing for Christ:

Drawing upon John the Baptist's, God's and Paul the Apostle's testimony, every Christian believer is called to bear witness for Christ. Let's explore this in more detail, with reference to the Bible, of course:

1 John 5:9-12

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. Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart. Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.

Once again, we are reminded in the Bible passage we just read that our testimony, above all, refers to Christ's witnessing, and that, when testifying by ourselves, we proclaim mankind's salvation through Jesus:

1 John 4:14-15

We have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God.

According to the Bible, Christian believers are reminded to be always prepared to bear witness for the very faith they have in Jesus. The Scriptures also emphasise that sharing the Christian faith has to be done with great caution, patience and wisdom:

1 Peter 3:15

In your hearts 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.

2 Timothy 4:2

Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction.

Colossians 1:28

We proclaim Him [Jesus], admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.

Like Paul and others, Christians are meant to share the Gospel with both believers and non-believers:

2 Corinthians 2:14-17

Thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task? Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God.

The Bible gives many accounts that, even though being a witness and testifying for Jesus comes with challenges and troubles, God encourages to go on sharing the Christian faith and promises help through the Holy Spirit:

Acts 23:11

The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome (see Acts 28:23, reporting on Paul's preaching to the Jews in Rome).

2 Timothy 1:7+8

God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline. Do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord.

Acts 1:8

You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

Romans 8:16, 26

The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children (...) The Spirit helps us in our weakness (...) The Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.

Our own testimony for Christ

Last but not least, let's explore ourselves and our relationship with Jesus regarding being witnesses of Christ.

As we have seen, witnessing for Christ means to give account of salvation with reference to the Scriptures and persons who came to faith in Jesus Christ and then went to tell others about their belief.

However, in addition we, insofar as we claim to be Christian believers, can share our faith also by giving a personal testimony of faith.

A personal testimony of faith may be used to approach people directly with the Gospel, that is, by sharing when and how we decided to turn our lives over to Jesus Christ.

Let's take the time (5 minutes) to write down our experience of such a decision, each of us individually. If you think that you have been always saved, or if you have doubts or haven't decided to accept Christ as your Saviour, mention what God means to you at this very moment.

You will receive a sheet of paper and a pen. After five minutes or so, you're asked to share your personal testimony of faith or your remarks with your neighbour. In the end, may be someone can even share in front of the congregation.

Music & Songs

Thanksgiving & Prayer

Let's pray according to **Colossians 1:3-14** (re-formulated and modified to be read aloud as a prayer with regard to the topic of this message):

We always thank You, God, the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray.

Thanks be to You for calling us to come to faith in Jesus Christ.

Thanks for the love You showed to us through Jesus Christ.

Thanks for the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for us in Heaven and that we have already heard about in the word of truth, the Gospel.

All over the world this Gospel is bearing fruit and growing.

Thank you for getting to know about Jesus' salvation in various ways, through accounts in the Bible, and maybe even by way of testimonies of Christian believers.

We ask You, oh God, to bring us to faith in Jesus Christ, or renew it, if we have grown weary or if sin overshadows the light that Your Son represents to us.

We ask you to forgive our sins, as we forgive those who have sinned against us.

We ask you to fill us with your Holy Spirit.

Lord, our Heavenly Father we pray this in order that we may live a life worthy of You, that we may please You in every way:

Bearing fruit, growing in the knowledge of You, witnessing and testifying for Christ, wherever and whenever You provide opportunities, being strengthened with all power according to Your glorious might so that we may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to You.

For You revealed to us that you rescued mankind from the dominion of darkness and want to bring us into the kingdom of light, into the presence of Your Son, Jesus Christ, in Whom we can have redemption.

To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Material for Self-Study and Group Work

Booklets:

The Four Spiritual Laws (EN)

Jumala rakastaa sinua (FIN), equivalent to The Four Spiritual Laws

Truth Event Tract (in preparation, EN/FIN)

The Four Spiritual Laws or Would you like to know God personally?

<http://www.ccci.org/wij/index.aspx>

Great Commission

<http://www.ccci.org/growth/transferable-concepts/07-how-you-can-help-fulfill-the-great-commission/index.aspx>

Fruitful Witness

<http://www.ccci.org/growth/transferable-concepts/05-how-you-can-be-a-fruitful-witness/index.aspx>

Witnessing Effectively

<http://www.ccci.org/growth/transferable-concepts/06-how-you-can-introduce-others-to-christ/index.aspx>

Witnessing

<http://www.tenbasicsteps.org/english/witnessing/step7/1.htm>

Spirit-filled Life

<http://www.ccci.org/growth/spirit-filled-life/index.aspx>

Ten Basic Steps to Christian Maturity

<http://www.ccci.org/growth/10-basic-steps/index.aspx>

Structure of the worship service:

Welcome Words (Bastian)

Opening Prayer (Heli)

Music & Songs (David Mathew, Everyone): 1. As the Deer, 2. Shine Jesus Shine

Message & Readings from Scripture (Bastian)

Personal Testimonies (everyone who has accepted Christ as his/her Saviour)

Music & Songs (David Mathew, Everyone): 3. El Shaddai, 4. Blessed Assurance

Thanksgiving & Prayers (Bastian), Blessing of Willa (Patrick D.)

Announcements (Bastian): Activities in summer, Truth Event, Lily's Wedding

Fellowship Time – Coffee, Tea & Snacks (Yve)

Offering (Everyone, voluntary, for ICFO's missionaries and God-child)

Our Answers to the Question:

What does one have to know in order to come to faith and start a relationship with God?

Man lost/Sin, God's judgement, Faith not with own power, God's mercy, Belief in and only through Christ, Confession of sins and repentance, Redemption and Hope, Everlasting Life.

