

SILENT SERMONS

Today we will look at three different people, who had something in common—they were all powerful preachers for God, but their sermons were silent. They witnessed greatly and evangelised for God, but their words are not recorded. They witnessed through their example.

It is often quoted that Francis of Assisi said “Preach the gospel always, if necessary use words.” Someone else put it this way “let your lives preach”. This doesn’t mean we can’t use words to preach or witness God’s Way to others. That is part of our life, and we should be able to use them—but sometimes that’s not necessary, and our lives, our deeds are more important than our words. Another quote: “A good example has twice the value of good advice.”

These 3 stories illustrate the fact that, in order to be an effective witness for God, one does not necessarily have to use words. Let’s see what we can learn from their stories.

1. ABEL

Let’s start near the beginning of the book—Genesis 4.

Genesis 4:2B-9 “Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. ³ In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. ⁴ And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favour on Abel and his offering, ⁵ but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favour. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. ⁶ Then the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? ⁷ If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.” ⁸ Now Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let’s go out to the field.” While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. ⁹ Then the LORD said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?” “I don’t know,” he replied. “Am I my brother’s keeper?”

Something interesting in this story is that Abel didn’t say a word! Yet his life preaches a powerful message. He was a righteous man, listed in Hebrews 11 amongst the heroes of faith.

Verse 4A speaks of Abel’s actions, not his words. His actions showed great love for God and generosity.

Verse 4B God looked first at Abel, and then at his offering.

1 Samuel 16:7 “But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”

God doesn’t look at appearances and physical things first, but at our heart, our attitude.

So God looked at Abel's heart first. What did He see? Most likely, an attitude of love and respect for God, obedience and gratitude, and service—which was reflected in the offering he brought.

Genesis 4:5 Cain's attitude wasn't so good. He had an attitude of greed, not of sacrifice and service to God. This was reflected in the fact that he only brought some fruit to God. When God questioned him, his attitude quickly came to the fore. (Verse 5B).

Notice Verse 7B. Isn't this so true of sin? A very interesting statement—"sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it."

Verse 8 Cain talked, but not Abel. Cain's statement was one of deception and trickery.

Verse 9B Cain's statement was a lie, and an attempt to pass the buck.

Verse 10 Interestingly, at last Abel said something. He only spoke after his death! His blood cried out! (Figurative language).

When we read about Abel in Hebrews 11, we see again that he only spoke after his death. And he is still speaking today!

Hebrews 11:4 "By faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did. By faith he was commended as righteous, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith Abel still speaks, even though he is dead."

So Abel didn't say much—not even one word is recorded. But his actions spoke louder than any words could, and as a result his silent sermon has made a lasting impact on God's people down through the centuries!

2. JOSEPH

At the beginning of the New Testament, we read of the birth of Jesus and the faith of His mother, Mary. But no one knows much about his father, Joseph. One of the reasons for that is that his words are nowhere found recorded in the gospels. Not a single word of Joseph can be found in the Bible—but that doesn't mean he didn't effectively witness for God! Much like Abel, he hadn't had speech training and was probably a quiet man, but he delivered his silent sermon in a powerful way.

Matthew 1:18-21, 24 ¹⁸ "This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins... ²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife."

He was a righteous man. It seems like maybe a quiet and gentle man. He did exactly what he was told—even though it would have been very hard for him to grasp and

understand what God was doing, and the plans He had in mind for Joseph, Mary and Jesus.

Joseph is mentioned again in Matthew 2:13-15 ¹³“When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.” ¹⁴ So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, ¹⁵ where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

Notice again what he was like. He obeyed to the letter, completely, and immediately—“during the night”. He didn’t sit around asking questions—he didn’t even speak (as far as we read!)

Matthew 2:19-21 ¹⁹“After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt ²⁰ and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child’s life are dead.” ²¹ So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel.”

The same example of obedience here again! So not a word of Joseph’s appears—but it is very clear he was an obedient and godly man. The sermon of his life is a silent but effective one.

3. DORCAS

Our third deliverer of silent sermons is in Acts 9:36-41. This time it is a woman, a lady who was a tailor or seamstress, but that didn’t stop her from being a silent evangelist of God’s Way. She used her work to the glory of God and for the blessing of others.

Verse 36 “In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (Hebrew: in Greek her name is Dorcas); she was **always doing good and helping the poor.**”

Verse 37 “About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room.”

Even good people become sick and die. God didn’t heal her sickness, even though she was one of His dedicated, devoted disciples.

Verse 38 “Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, “Please come at once!”

They may have hoped Peter would resurrect her. He had performed a great healing miracle in Verse 34, healing Aeneas, a paralytic who had been bedridden for 8 years. That’s why they washed the body, but didn’t anoint it for burial.

Verse 39 “Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them.”

What a scene it must have been! She was greatly loved because she had been a fantastic example of God’s generosity and service in helping others. Obviously she had especially helped the widows and the poor. Her life had been a silent sermon—no words

are recorded, but just her deeds. Helping the needy communicates God's love in a better way than words can do.

Proverbs 19:17 "Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and He will reward them for what they have done.

Verse 40 "Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up."

This was one of the greatest miracles of the early church! Even at this time, she didn't speak! But she had spoken enough by her actions

Verses 41-42 ⁴¹ "He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called for the believers, especially the widows, and presented her to them alive. ⁴² This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord."

People were brought into the Church because of her.

I mentioned earlier the quote from Francis of Assisi, "Preach the gospel always, if necessary use words." I looked it up on the internet and found that there is no proof he ever said that! However, it is apparently the way he thought, as shown by other things he did, and the writings that we do have from him. Here is an example from his life which I found interesting.

"One day Francis said to one of the young monks, "Let us go down into the town and preach!" The novice, delighted at being singled out to be a companion of Francis, obeyed with great enthusiasm. They passed through the main streets, turned down many of the byways and alleys, made their way into the suburbs, and at great length, returned by a circuitous route to the monastery gate. As they approached the gate, the younger monk reminded Francis of his original intention. "You have forgotten that we went to the town to preach!" "My son" Francis replied, "we have preached. We were preaching while we were walking. We have been seen by many; our behaviour has been closely watched; it was thus that we have preached our morning sermon. It is of no use to walk anywhere to preach unless we preach everywhere as we walk."

How many sermons have you preached without knowing it? We are called, as Christians, to bring the love and peace of Christ into the world not only with our lips but also in our lives.

Matthew 5:14-16:¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."

It's more important to use our lives than our lips.

1 John 3:18 "Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth."

Here is one of the problems with using our words—words are easier and cheaper than actions! "Put your life where your mouth is."

But that doesn't mean words are wrong. We need to love our brothers with words as well. A word of encouragement or love does great good! And a well-placed word can be a great witness of Christ and the gospel! That's another sermon.

But it is instructive to look at the lives of 3 people who spread the gospel powerfully and didn't use any words at all!

The world today is surely in need of such silent sermons. And every single one of us can be a preacher and evangelist of the good news of God's Kingdom in this way! Some are good with words, some aren't. But all of us need to do some preaching by living our life as a silent sermon!