

Russell Kelfer

The Tests of a Testimony: The Moment of Truth

550-B

Series: The Beatitudes



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Note: Russell wrote each of these lessons in a manner that would enable him to clearly communicate them to his weekly class. The grammar or punctuation you encounter may not be technically perfect, but you will certainly “hear” his unique gift for making the message applicable to the common man in everyday situations.

It’s been said of him that he was really a writer who read his stuff. And that’s a very accurate statement!

May you be richly blessed as you “hear” as you read.

The Tests of a Testimony: Moment of Truth

In the last two lessons, we have been learning what it means to be God's ambassadors, sent ones, sent out to lead people to peace with God. In the first lesson, we reviewed our purpose and our placement. In the second lesson, we began to look at our preparation. In that light, we decided to look at Jesus, our perfect peacemaker. We observed the principles used by the Prince of Peace. We looked at the Master in three back to back encounters with people.

In John 3, Jesus encountered a man named Nicodemus, a Pharisee who was a ruler of the Jews. In John 4, we saw Jesus encounter a Samaritan woman. In John 5, Jesus found the impotent man at the pool of Bethesda. We looked at Jesus first. As we looked at the perception and saw the amazing discernment Jesus had as He looked at the crowd and saw a specific person. As He looked at this person, we saw that He knew his heart. He knew when to speak and when to listen. He knew when to demand and when to ask. He has offered to us the very mind of Christ. You and I can possess His discernment, His mind. We can possess the wisdom of heaven for the ministry on earth.

In the last lesson we looked at five things that we can do to appropriate godly discernment:

1- We can invest our lives in the Scripture. Psalm 119:98 tells us that we, through the Scriptures, can become wiser than our peers, wiser than our teachers, even wiser than the ancients. Hebrews 4:12 tells us that Scripture is the discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. It gives us godly discernment.

2- We can spend more time in the presence of the Father. Acts 4:13 says that the crowd could note that the men speaking to them were ignorant and unlearned men, but that they had been with Jesus. Jesus was the source of their wisdom. The source of Jesus' wisdom came from spending time with the Father.

3- We can ask God for wisdom. We looked at James 1:5-8. If we lack discernment, this passage tells us to ask God, believe

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that He hears us and that He will answer and we will receive that discernment.

4- We can use the discernment that He gives us for His glory.

His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.'

(Matthew 25:21 NKJV)

5- We can be obedient to what we know to do. That act of obedience will open up our capacity to gain more wisdom.

He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him."

(John 14:21 NKJV)

In the last lesson we looked at four aspects of Jesus' witness:

1- Jesus perception. What went on in the eyes of God as He saw the throngs and then singled out the few?

2- His prospects. His prospect list was very unusual. There was Nicodemus in John 3. The Samaritan woman was in John 4. The crippled man by the pool of Bethesda was in John 5. These were three individuals that you and I, for various reasons, possibly would have either discounted or discarded. We saw a pompous Pharisee, a sinful Samaritan and a helpless individual.

We then tried to look at them through the eyes of God to see what Jesus saw when He looked at them. We learned: 1) He saw all people as prospects for the Kingdom; 2) He saw all people as they could become in Him; 3) how our hearts could react the same way to the paperboy, the grocery clerk, the relative or the angry salesman as they could become in Him and 4) He saw all people on an equal footing. There is no social strata in the Kingdom. The ground beneath the cross is level. Jesus had no hang ups about spending time with a religious, self-righteous Pharisee, an immoral reject or a helpless outcast. On His scale of 1 to 10, they were all 10's, and so are we.

3- His presentation. We noticed three things:

1) Jesus asked a lot of questions. Questions take a conversation and remove it from the realm of preaching to involvement. We talked about four questions that you can ask people to draw them into an arena of spiritual interest: 1) "Are you interested in spiritual things?" 2) "Have you ever thought of becoming a Christian?"

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3) “What would you say a Christian is?” and 4) “Would you like to know what the Bible says a Christian is?”

2) Jesus used a lot of illustrations. To Nicodemus, He talked about birth and about the wind. To the Samaritan woman, He took the simple thing of water to make His point. He took the simplest physical things and transformed them into the deepest of spiritual truths. I gave you some challenges and illustrations about how this can be done in your own life. I challenged you to go home and think of your realm and the world in which you live and then come up with some illustrations that you could use in your own particular situation. Communication of God’s truths is so important.

3) His goal was always an invitation into the Kingdom. Here is the place where many of us justify our way out of the real purpose of witnessing. This happens either because we feel failure or rejection. Granted, many times we are called just to be seed planters. Other times we are called to water those seeds that others or we may have planted. But how many times is the harvest ready and we sprinkle and split? The goal of God is to lead men and women to Decision-ville.

Using an illustration, we see the Christian trying to lead someone to Decision-ville. As he begins, he knows that the only way to get there is through the vehicle of the Word of God. He looks at a map and notes that he must go through Question Town and Illustration City on the way. The one thing he must do, however, is to bypass Extra-curricular Road that ends in Controversy County (off of the main road). He must understand that every person says “Yes” or “No” whenever he hears the gospel. If someone hears the gospel and says “Maybe”, or nothing at all, for that moment he has said “No”. It is also important, therefore, for him to understand and for those to whom we witness to understand, that Decision-ville is a place all must pass through to enter the Kingdom.

Suppose you are now living a life without Jesus Christ. You cannot pass by this lesson and hear the Word of God as it relates to the kingdom of God without making a decision. You may decide to do nothing. By deciding to do nothing, you have said “No.” Do you remember the Australian man in the story two lessons ago? He was sowing seeds. Even the seeds he was sowing left no doubt that a decision had to be made.

Let me ask you a question. Do you honestly believe that? Do you honestly believe that every man to whom you speak and every

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woman with whom you share has only two choices in life? Do you believe that they will either spend eternity in heaven or in hell? Do you honestly believe that the person you care so much about that you have never shared the gospel with is facing a choice of either life or death? Do you honestly believe that man's choice is to either spend eternity with God or eternity separated from God? Do you believe in an eternity where there is no pain, no suffering, no sorrow, no sickness and no sin? Do you believe in an eternity of torment where the Scripture says that the fire is never quenched and the worm never dies? Do you also agree that this person is not only deciding on eternity, but life here that can have purpose and power and promise? Contrast that to a life that focuses on self, that has to live with the sin question and deal with the senselessness of a life without God?

Occasionally, we need to remind ourselves of the simplest truth of the Scripture. This truth is that there are a few people in this world who will see the Kingdom of God. The Scripture says,

The road is narrow and few there be that enter thereby.

(Matthew 7:14 paraphrased)

There are a few people who have peace with God, and they have found it through Jesus Christ and have been born again. On the other side of that line, there are multitudes that say "the way is broad and many there be that go thereby". There are many people who are on the road to eternity in hell apart from Christ and without God.

Satan has created an imaginary line. He has created a box. This is a group of people whom he calls "good unbelievers". These are those who have not been "born again" but really are neat folks. He calls them the "almost maybe saved." It is a lie. Everyone you meet will either be spending eternity with God or eternity in hell. You may say, "I don't like to hear that. That is too sharp. That is too vivid. That is too clear." That is too Scriptural. This is what the Word of God says. There are no "almost maybe saved" people.

There was a song in the 1940's that said, "either you is or you isn't, there is no in between." That is the right idea. Either you is or you isn't saved. Occasionally, we need to remind ourselves that all men have a series of choices, but there is only one choice that leads to God. There is this road called life. There are many by-pass routes of religion, self-righteousness or works and self-worth. There is the road of ambition and achievement and authority. But

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there is only one way to God and that is through faith in Jesus Christ. Do you believe that? If you and I really believe that, it will affect the way we look at our neighbors. It will affect the way we look at the clerk who waits on us. It will affect the way we look at the person who comes to our front door tomorrow. It will affect the way we deal with our children and their friends.

If we honestly believe the very simplest of truths, that all men have a choice to make, and there is only one way to spend eternity with God, then it means that Jews and the Mormons and the Muslims and the members of a “Christian” church who have no relationship with Jesus Christ may well be much more moral than you are. They may be more disciplined than you are. They may be more cultured than you are. They may be more accepted and more acceptable than you are, but if they have not come to God through faith in Jesus Christ, they are destined to spend their life here and in eternity without God. You may be the ambassador that God is sending to lead them to peace.

Scripture asks the question,

For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?
(Matthew 16:26 NKJV)

The goal of the whole conversation of witnessing to someone is the decision. To Nicodemus Jesus said, “You must be born again.” He said, “Nick, the program you are on won’t hack it. You are very religious, very accepted and very disciplined in the Law. You do all of the right things, but you are lost. You are really lost Nicodemus, because you don’t know that you are lost.”

To the Samaritan woman Jesus said, “You must ask Me, and I will give you living water. The issue is not where you worship. The issue is who you worship. Ask Me and I will give you spiritual things. I will give you My Spirit. Your sins have destroyed you. I will remake you. Ask Me, and I will give it to you.”

To the invalid at the pool Jesus said, “Do you want to be made whole? Do you want to be changed in spirit? Tell Me ‘Yes’ or ‘No’. I will do the healing, but you must do the deciding.” Decision is the object of witnessing.

To get there, you have to use the vehicle of the Word of God. I think that this can be academic to some of you. I apologize for teaching a lesson that seems academic and redundant, but I felt it was necessary as we study this lesson to be clear. There are

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some here who have not put some of these foundation posts in the ground. How many of you know by memory, three, four, five or six verses that will help you lead someone else through the gospel to faith in Christ? For those of you who don't, I want to give you an outline. There are hundreds of verses, but I want to remind you of six widely used verses to lead someone to Christ. If you don't know some others, you can learn these. It will be a start. The outline is very simple.

I- The Problem is Sin

II- The Solution is Free

III- The Solution is Jesus

IV- The Solution is Yours

V- Ask Him

VI- There He Is

The Problem is Sin.

This may sound too simple, but it is real. We see this in Romans.

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,
(Romans 3:23 NKJV)

In other words, it is universally true that the problem with man is sin. We need to have at our fingertips what God says about it.

The Solution is Free.

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
(Romans 6:23 NKJV)

The Solution is Jesus.

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8 NKJV)

The Solution is Yours.

We see in John,

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:
(John 1:12 NKJV)

Ask Him.

We see this in Revelation,

Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.
(Revelation 3:20 NKJV)

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There He Is.

Then, He did what we asked Him to do.

And this is the testimony: that 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. (I John 5:11,12 NKJV)

These are such simple verses. Every believer needs to memorize these verses or some others like it. It would be good to memorize this outline or another like it. Learn to use the Scripture and never apologize for using it.

...for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who
believes,... (Romans 1:16 NKJV)

Peter said,

having been born again, not of corruptible seed but
incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides
forever, (I Peter 1:23 NKJV)

As you approach Decision-ville using the vehicle of the Scripture, remember that you must avoid Religion Ridge. It is a dead end, and there is a deep chasm where the enemy awaits to ambush you. The Samaritan woman is one of the best illustrations in Scripture of the perspective pitfalls of Religion Ridge. If you have been around for a long time, you have heard them all. You have heard people say, "But I was raised a (fill in the blank with a denomination)." You can respond, "I know what you mean, I was raised as a denomination, and one day I came to the realization that my denomination is not what really mattered. I understood that what mattered is that I have a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. That is what I want to talk to you about today." Or someone may say to you, "But my granddaddy was a Baptist preacher." I don't know how many Baptist or Methodist preachers there used to be, but everybody I ever talked to has been related to one. I think a good answer to that would be, "Wouldn't it mean a lot to him if he knew that today you were considering spiritual things?"

Another statement is, "Do you believe in 'falling from grace?'" Or another one is, "Do you believe in speaking in tongues?" Another one is, "Do you believe in infant baptism?" People can get sidetracked with many "Do you believe...?" questions. I think a good answer for those questions is to say, "That is a good question, but the real issue is not whether each of us believe that. The real

issue is, do I believe that Jesus Christ died for my sins according to the Scripture? Do I believe that He rose again personally for me and that He offers eternal life to me? I will tell you later how I feel about your question, if you will tell me now, how you feel about receiving Jesus Christ as your personal Savior.” Always go back to the main issue.

Someone may come up with the statement, “One time I knew a preacher who did this horrible thing.” Or another one is, “My Uncle Harry was a deacon, and he did a horrible thing.” I think a good answer to those statements might be, “I knew about a situation like that one time, too. Isn’t it remarkable how with all of those pressures, how few preachers and Christian leaders succumb to those temptations compared to their counterparts in the world? It is the power of God that keeps them. Christians aren’t perfect people. They are imperfect people with a perfect Savior. You are imperfect, so you qualify, too.”

Someone may come up with the statement, “How can a loving God send all of those people to hell?” I think you can counter that with another question, “The real question seems to me to be, ‘How can a righteous God receive into His presence sinners like us?’ The answer is by covering us with the blood of the sinless one, Jesus Christ. Wouldn’t you like to be received into His presence today?” You can share what He said to the thief on the cross, “Today, thou shalt be with Me in paradise.”

The Samaritan woman, when the heat was on, did the same thing. When her personal sin became the issue, she began to talk about religious differences. Let’s follow that dialogue for just a moment. We won’t spend much time there. First, she came up with diversion by ancestry. Then, she came up with diversion by doctrine or denomination. First, she said, “Our fathers say this, but Your fathers say that. We are not in the same club. We come from different places, so I can’t listen to You and I can’t talk to you about religious things.” She then diverted even more when she said, “Our fathers say that we are supposed to worship on this mountain, and Your people say that we are supposed to worship in Jerusalem. We have a doctrinal difference that we can’t overcome.”

Jesus said to her, “You’ve got it all wrong. It is not where you worship, it is who you worship. It is not your fathers, it is you.” Jesus looked into her eyes and told her, “The problem is that you don’t know who you worship, but I do. You don’t have a personal, experiential knowledge of a personal God, but I do. The hour is

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coming when it won't matter what church you belong to. The only thing that is going to matter is, that you know the Spirit of the Living God." Jesus goes on to say, "God is seeking those to worship Him. God is coming to you to ask you to respond to Him."

This is witnessing. We must lead people from diversion to decision. To do this, we honestly answer real questions and seriously sidestep demonic diversions until we come, in God's timing, to the moment of truth. We pray for a sensitive spirit, because there is a time in every man or woman's life when sin is sin, and they know it. They know they need help. They know they need a Savior. Some may have dozens of chances, but I believe Scripture teaches that every person is guaranteed one chance. At that point in time, you set aside the questions, you set aside the illustrations and you set aside the theological discussions because the Dayspring from on high is visiting them and knocking on the door of their hearts. It is their moment of truth.

I want to share a poem with you that expresses this principle.

MOMENT OF TRUTH

In each man's life there comes a time
In sunset, or in youth,
When face-to-face his spirit comes
To that soul-searching "Moment of Truth."

To some, it may come in a time of great joy,
To some, in an hour of strife,
To many it comes upon hearing the Word
Or seeing it vibrant in life.

As the hands of conviction descend upon man
Though thrilling the life may have been,
The fire of Calvary pierces the past
In a Moment of Truth...it is sin!

The echo of footsteps...the cry in the dark,
Those events man cannot understand,
Seem to point toward a time when the soul is exposed
And the Moment of Truth is at hand!

Deceptively, something says, "Someday I will."
And the light more revealing now glows,
As satanic impressions keep flooding the mind
"Will this Moment of Truth never close?"

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Then, to many, praise God, the Moment of Truth
As billows of fire fill the soul,
Mean surrender to God...and union with Christ
And the blood of the Lamb makes them whole.

The fire subsides, the heart finds new joy
And an indwelling peace comes to pass.
In a Moment of Truth, the soul found its rest
And forgiveness for sins of the past.

Yet to others, this self-same Moment of Truth
Finds its chance to redeem denied,
And ears waxed closed reveal a heart
With an unwanted Savior outside.

Will another time come? We pray that it shall.
Yet the soul finds no promise within.
That the still, small voice in that Moment of Truth
Will ever return again.

To someone, that Moment of Truth we laud
Is beckoning even this hour,
And faintly, within that sin-scarred heart,
There's a rumbling of God's latent power.

In the name of our Lord, who on Calvary's Hill
Bore all of YOUR sins on that tree,
I beseech you to hearken this Moment of Truth
And forever in Him to be free.

Ceasing never to sing...Hosannahs to God
For as long as His grace shall allow.
May the Spirit proclaim in His marvelous name
That your Moment of Truth...is now!

That is how Jesus presented the gospel. He asked questions. He used illustrations. He used the Scripture, bypassing controversy to point to a decision to bring men and women to a moment of truth. That was His presentation.

Let's now look at His testimony, His trust and His team.

1- What is a testimony? A testimony is when you tell someone what you have seen and heard. John said it best in I John,

that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

(I John 1:3 NKJV)

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Fellowship is unity based upon a common heart. It is two fellows in the same ship. We go back to the Master's example in John 3 where He spoke to Nicodemus,

Most assuredly, I say to you, we speak what we know
(John 3:11 NKJV)

The Amplified Translation says,

...we have actually seen what we are testifying to. We are
eyewitnesses of it. (John 3:11 Amplified Bible)

That is what men want to hear. "I know the Father," Jesus said, "I speak from personal reality." That is what people want to hear.

In John 4:25-26 the Samaritan woman said to Jesus, "We know there is a Messiah coming. We know there is a personal God coming. When He comes, He will tell us all about it personally." Jesus looked at her and replied, "He has come. I am He. I am alive!" That is the whole message of the gospel, He is alive! The gospel is not an impersonal theology, it is a personal experience. The song says, "He's alive! And I'm forgiven, heavens gates are opened wide, He's alive!"

When I first became a Christian and even before that, I used to go to a large church. They had evangelistic services twice a year. I could never forget it. This is the church where I met Christ. At these services, I can remember that they would start with the chorus to the song, "He Lives!" There were about 1,000 people there, and the service would begin with these people breaking out, singing, "He lives! He lives! Christ Jesus lives today, He walks with me and talks with me along life's narrow way. He lives! He lives! Salvation to impart. You ask me how I know He lives, He lives within my heart." It was a moving experience to me as an unbeliever. It was a moving experience for me as a young Christian to hear Christians spontaneously start to shout, "He's alive!" That, you see, is the message of the gospel.

In the last lesson, I asked each one of you to write your personal testimony. I believe this is important for all of us to do. I know that some of you have and some of you haven't. I also know that some of you didn't understand what I meant by asking you to write your testimony. It is a personal account of your personal encounter with Jesus Christ. Paul's testimony was central in the New Testament. We have parts of it scattered through all of the epistles. We have it specifically in detail in the book of Acts. We see it in Acts 9 where the writer gives the account. We see it in Acts 22 where Paul gave

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his defense in Jerusalem. We see it in Acts 26 where he gave his testimony to King Agrippa. He gives us a clear outline of how to share what has happened in our lives. Your testimony may not be as dramatic as Paul's. That is not important. You may or may not know the exact moment in time when you became a Christian. That is not what is important. What is important is that you include at least some of these points.

- 1- What was your life like before Christ became real to you?
- 2- How did you come to know Christ personally?
- 3- How can others come to know Christ personally?
- 4- What kind of change has there been in your heart and in your life since Jesus came in to stay?

If we combine the three accounts in Acts, we can learn some things from Paul's testimony. We can learn that Paul related to his audience. He said, "I am a Jew just like you are." He spoke in Hebrew, and the Scripture tells us that their eyes lit up, and they listened. He said, "I understand your heart. I grew up at the feet of Gamaliel." Paul related to his past as he said, "I was a Pharisee and grew up in the church. I was religious. I persecuted those who went by The Way. But I was empty and didn't know God." Then Paul related his encounter with Christ. He shared all of the details that were necessary. He said, "I wasn't looking for Christ, Christ was looking for me." He gave the details. He told where he was, where he was going, why he was going there and even what time it was. He said it was noon. He told how God approached him and how he responded. Paul then related to his life after conversion. Then, Paul told how he was excited about the future.

As we finish our lesson, I want to help crystallize the first four of the seven tests of a testimony. I would like to ask you again to write out your personal testimony. I will tell you why as we go through this. Use these tests to see if you have included everything.

Test 1- Make it natural and personal. Paul's testimony was uniquely Paul. His inflections, his illustrations and his insights all reflected who he was. They would not have been right for you or me at all. If you are from the South, drawl. If you are from the East, clip your words, that's O.K. If you are a grinner, grin. If you are a crier, cry. First and foremost, be yourself. It is your story. God will send you to people who need to hear your story. That is the uniqueness of the Gospel. Every person has the same story, but every person's story is different. We are going to hear some testimonies in the

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next few lessons. You will find that as each person shares his or her testimony, it will be unique and dynamic, but it won't be yours. As someone else shares his or her testimony, it will be unique and dynamic, but it won't be like the first one we hear.

Test 2- Make it concise. This is why we write it out. First you take the ego out of it, and then you take the unnecessary out of it. You try to make it short enough to listen to, but long enough to understand. Write your testimony out this week in no less than 1,000 words. You may say, "That is too many." Then when you have done that, write it again in no less than 500 words. When you have finished that, write it in no less than 250 words. There will be times when you have a captive audience and people will listen to you all day, but not many. Very few people are interested in what your Aunt Anna said to Uncle Charlie about baptism in 1936. Most of the time you have from two to four or five minutes, therefore, you need a five minute testimony and a two minute testimony.

Test 3- Make it understandable. Clean out the religious lingo. It is a challenge to see if you can write your testimony without using any words or phrases that a non-Christian would not understand or be offended by. When you write your testimony, assume the mind of the listener. Write it without the words saved, sanctified, redeemed, regenerated or any of the rest. Write it in layman's language. Write it in the language of one who does not know the Word of God. Make no reference to former religious relationships in a derogatory light. An example of this would be, "I was a member of this denomination, but I wasn't a Christian." You may be building an unnecessary wall. You can say, "I was a church member, but I didn't know Christ."

Test 4- Paraphrase the verses I gave you, or others like it, in your own words using the same pattern. Use no words a non-Christian would not understand. Use no words that a non-Christian would be offended by. For instance, Romans 3:23,

"All men have missed God's mark and have decided to be their own bosses. They have rejected God's offer to run their lives for them. They have fallen short of God's goal which is a life in which God is in control. So all men are cut off from God and need a way back to His presence. God has given each of us a gift, a free ticket back into His world. Jesus died to pay the cost of the ticket for each of us. He loves us so much that He did it in spite of our rebellion. If you ask Him to, He will usher you into His Father's presence and give you His Father's life. Ask Him."

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These are the six verses we talked about earlier. They are paraphrased in such a way that you at least don't use the same word or terminology that might offend or confuse a non-Christian.

We must remember that our ministry and mission is to be messengers, not salesmen. A salesman has the responsibility to package it, create a need for it, collect for it and make it back with the profits. He is responsible and gets paid accordingly. A messenger simply takes and delivers a message that is given to him where he is commissioned to take it. The message isn't his, it is God's. The results aren't his, they are God's. The responsibility isn't his, it is God's. God takes all of the responsibility. All He asks you to do is to take the message. He is counting on you and me to take the message faithfully.

I want to close with a poem.

An angel came to Christ one day
And said, "Oh Lord, what now,
That Thou hast borne the sins of men
With thorns upon Thy brow?"

"My people shall be witnesses,"
We heard the Master say,
"And they will testify of Me
Each hour and every day."

"But what if they should silent be,
For Thou doest know of man?"
And softly My Redeemer said,
"I have no other plan."

Blessed are the peacemakers, those who lead men to peace with God. May we be named among those.

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10602 Mossbank, San Antonio, TX 78230
210-226-0000 or 1-800-375-7778
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