

In 1 Kings chapter 10 we read of the visit of the Queen of Sheba to King Solomon. Having heard of his wisdom and fame, she came to prove him with hard questions. There was no question she posed that he was unable to answer. Having heard Solomon's wisdom, and witnessing first hand his great wealth, "there was no more spirit in her." (v. 5) And then we read her response to the king: "It was a true report that I heard in mine own land of thy acts (words) and of thy wisdom. Howbeit ... *the half was not told me*: thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame of which I heard." (vs. 6 – 7) It is those six words in italics I wish to focus on. In today's language you may have heard them paraphrased as 'Sure you haven't heard the half of it!' or 'The half has never been told.' In the 21st century, is it similarly true that *the half has never been told* concerning the life-changing reality of the risen Christ, where many who have personally come to know Him as Saviour maintain a silence about what He has done in their lives, and what He can do for others? A sixties songwriter sang the refrain 'Silence Is Golden', yet this isn't the Bible's message as regards sharing the gospel message with others. On bringing healing and wholeness to broken lives, time and time again we read of Christ's instruction to those whose lives He had touched: "... Go home to thy friends, and *tell* them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee." (Mark 5:19) But have we become comfortable with 'silence' rather than 'telling'? In this editorial I would like to consider what Scripture would say about such silence, and how it can be broken.

1. The REASONS for our Silence. Many reasons could be cited, but let me suggest just seven. (1) We feel that spreading the good news is the minister's job – after all, he's the professional! But such reasoning misses the fact that you will rub shoulders with and touch the lives of people who may never enter a church door, and whom your minister may never meet or speak to. (2) We assume most people know something of the gospel message. Yet our CSCU Chairman shared recently how, after witnessing to a friend, he learned that no one else had ever shared Christ with him before. (3) Joylessness – through unwise choices or unrelenting challenges we have lost our radiance for Christ. Yet help is at hand: "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right (constant) spirit within me ... Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation ..." (Ps 51:10 & 12) (4) Opposition – in a society where many believe that God and heaven can be accessed on our terms, rather than God's, we are not flavour of the month if we voice a contrary view (John 14:6). (5) Fear – might I upset, offend or alienate a friend or colleague, look stupid if I don't have all the answers, or be ridiculed for sharing my faith? The fear of man can bring a snare (Prov 29:25), yet God has not given us the "spirit of fear; but of power, of love, and of a sound mind." (2 Tim 1:7) And God has said: "... open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." (Ps 81:10) (6) We've become so preoccupied with the here and now that we have lost sight of eternal realities. "Where there is no vision, the people perish ..." (Prov 29:18) (7) We're doing 'very well, thank you', so we're really not that bothered about anyone else. Yet Jesus said: "... Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled." (Lk 14:23)

2. The REBUKE for our Silence. In 2 Kings chapter 7 we read of four hungry lepers who had entered into the camp of the Syrians, being unaware that the Lord had caused their enemy to flee, down to the last man. Entering into two tents, they ate of the good things there, before carrying away the abandoned gold, silver and raiment. Then one said to another: "... *We do not well: this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace ...*" (v 9) Initially they had been content to keep their discovery to themselves, but they relayed their news to the king's household, so that all the people of Israel might benefit. Can we be similarly willing to keep the good news of Jesus Christ to ourselves? There is an interesting verse in Isaiah 54:5 which, though addressed originally to Israel, surely has equal relevance to those who, by faith in Christ, are His people today: "For thy Maker is thine husband; the Lord of Hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. *The God of the whole earth shall he be called.*" Notice those last ten words – God is not to be the exclusive possession of Christians, which we simply keep to ourselves. No, He is to be the God of all mankind, and we are to be the means of bringing that about.

3. The RECIPE for Breaking our Silence. It has been said that there are three essential qualities in a good witness. He (or she) must *be something*, they must *know something*, and they must *say something*. Let me break this down under five headings:

Probity. This is a word often used in legal matters, but it simply means *integrity* – where what we do corresponds with, rather than contradicts, what we say we believe. In a world today where many know little about the Bible or the claims of Christ, they still know enough to recognise that there should be a difference and distinctiveness in the life of the Christian. If we're just as grouchy / short-tempered or as preoccupied with money, possessions, celebrity culture etc. as the next person, or if our conduct belies expected Christian behaviour, it *will* be noticed. From comments I've overheard, I know this to be true. Do you walk the talk, and have you a testimony that does stand up to scrutiny? This is the foundation upon which everything else will stand or fall.

Preparation. The Apostle Peter gave the following exhortation: "... be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear (reverence)." (1 Pet 3:15) If you put yourself in the shoes of a non-Christian whom you may be speaking to, I would suggest there are four key questions they may ask: (1) Just what do you believe and why? (2) Why did you become a Christian? (3) How has your life changed since you trusted Christ? (4) How does a person become a Christian? Just as we prepare for anything of importance in life, it can pay dividends to sit down with a piece of paper and jot down some key thoughts around these questions. Faced with a spur of the moment enquiry from someone, we may give a weak, sketchy or incomplete answer, whilst that little bit of thought and preparation in advance really can make such a difference.

Perspective. When my father died last September I developed a real yearning to know more about heaven. And then the thought struck me – is this what it has taken to make me hunger to know more about the place Christ is also preparing for

me? If we truly grasped the limitless wonders of heaven – or the awfulness of hell – would we not be re-energised to more fervently labour to point lost souls away from the miseries of one to the eternal safety of the other?

Prayer. Faced with opposition, the first disciples prayed: “And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with *all boldness* they may speak thy word. (Acts 4:29) As Christ’s witnesses today, how we need to pray for opportunities, for boldness, for wisdom, and for God’s help amidst these difficult days (Mk 16:20).

Proclamation. “Let the redeemed of the LORD say so ...” (Ps 107:2) You don’t have to be an outstanding orator to say something. When God called Moses and Jeremiah to be His servants, both bemoaned their lack of eloquence. We even read that the mighty Apostle Paul’s bodily presence was described as “weak” and his speech as “contemptible” (2 Cor 10:10). Did that stop God from using them? Peter and John were perceived as “unlearned and ignorant men”, yet when others saw their boldness, “they marvelled; and ... took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.” (Acts 4:13) Herein is the source of power. And never forget, even if you feel you can only say a few words for Jesus, you can also share the gospel by passing on a tract or Christian pamphlet, or by sending a text, e-mail, card or letter. Most people who are Christians today heard the gospel message in many ways, from many people, at many times, before they came through for God. And you can be a part of that chain of love and grace.

So, to recap. You have to be something (*probity*). You have to know something (*preparation, perspective and prayer*). And you have to say something (*proclamation*).

4. The REWARD for Breaking our Silence. Can a Christian have a much greater joy than pointing someone to the Saviour? I have never had this experience personally, but rejoice that I’ve been a link in the chain on at least one occasion. And so can you. As Jesus taught, both those who sow and those who ultimately reap will rejoice together (John 4:36). Can there be a greater privilege than being Christ’s ambassador (2 Cor 5:20) and labouring to change eternal destinies? “And they that be wise (teachers) shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.” (Daniel 12:3) Truly, “... he (or she) that winneth souls is wise” (Prov 11:30), as they lay up treasures for themselves in heaven (Matt 6:20). Earthly investments may depreciate, markets may fall as well as rise, but investments in heaven will stand. When we cast our bread upon the waters: we will find it after many days. (Eccl 11:1) “They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.” (Ps 126:5-6) The labour may not be easy, it will have its challenges, yet the battle is not ours, but God’s (2 Chron 20:15).