TITLE: A Sermons in Shoe Leather

TEXT: 2nd Co. 3:2-3; Jn. 13:34-35; 1 Pet. 2:12; Jn. 8:3-11; Jam. 3:13; Mt. 5:14-15

INTRODUCTION: This morning I want to talk about Sermons in Shoe Leather.

Do you realize that if you are a Christian that you are a Sermon in shoe leather? You are a walking sermon? Your life is a potential Gospel Message?

**2 Corinthians 3:2 - 3 (NIV) 2You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody.****3You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.**

**2You yourselves are our letter… known and read by everybody.**

As a Christian, with every breath that we take and every step we make our life becomes a letter known and read by everyone around us…The question is what will be the content of the letter that is written on the tablets of our heart that those around us will see?

God intends for our life to be a letter from Christ to the rest of our world!

**3You show that you are a letter from Christ---written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.**

And our life is not just to be a letter, but it is to be a love letter….

**John 13:34-35 (NIV)**

**34“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”**

How will people know that we are a disciple of Jesus Christ, a letter from Christ to our world?

Jesus says, by the love that we show one another, by the life that we live in front of them.

So, God tells us that we are to be a sermon is shoe leather…Live our lives as a walking sermon….

Do you realize that you, your life, may be the only Bible some people will ever see in their entire lifetime?

When we call ourselves by the name of Christ we become an open book for the world around us to read.

And they are watching, aren’t they?

Every time a prominent Christian mess up we see just how much the world is watching by all the instant criticism that comes forth from them….

They call themselves a Christian and they did that!

I wouldn’t even do that, and I am not a Christian!

If you don’t think that, as a Christian, your life is an open book for everyone to read, just see what happens when you miss the mark, when you mess up in your walk with the Lord---Someone will notice and often make the connection between you and Christ..

One afternoon in 1953, reporters, officials, dignitaries, and the welcoming committee gathered at the Chicago railway station awaiting the arrival of the 1952’s Nobel Peace Prize winner. There was naturally anticipation and excitement, even in Chicago. The train came to a halt and he stepped off the train---a giant man, just over six-feet four inches, erect in posture, with a thatch of bushy hair, a large mustache, and dressed simply in a cotton khaki suit and tie. The only thing missing was his trademark pith helmet.

Cameras flashed; city officials approached with outstretched hands.

They presented him with a key to the city and began telling him how honored they were to meet him. It was a formal kind of occasion.

He expressed a polite thanks, and then paused, as he was looking at something catching his eye over their heads.

He looked at them and asked if he could be excused for a few moments. He then made his way through the waiting crowd with quick, firm strides until he reached the side of an elderly black lady who was struggling as she attempted to carry two rather large heavy suitcases. No one had offered to help, and everyone was focused on the man who had just departed the train.

He nodded to the lady, picked up those two suitcases in his big hands, carried them to the open luggage compartment where the bus driver placed them on the rack, and with a smile escorted the lady to the waiting bus, on which she apparently was making her way home following her train ride.

Then he helped her aboard the bus, helped her find a seat, and wished her a safe journey and that someone would be at the other end to help her with her load.

Meanwhile the crowd had tagged along behind him, observing this scene, and maybe all feeling a bit guilty for not having offered to help.

He turned to them and simply said: sorry for keeping you waiting.”

And the welcoming continued, but almost in hushed tones of greeting. Almost as though something spiritual had just taken place---it was sensed and not easily written about. The lesson was obvious.

The Nobel-Prize winner was the world famous, missionary – doctor, Albert Schweitzer. A man who had spent his life helping the poorest of the poor in Africa.

One of the members of the official reception committee turned to one of the Chicago Times reporters and said: That’s the first time I ever saw a sermon walking.”

If that was true what a terrible commentary on the Church!

We are all called to be walking sermons! People should see the evidence of that every day as we walk among them…

John Wesley had this “Rule of Conduct” for the Christian life….

Do all the good you can

By all the means you can

In all the ways you can

In all the places you can

To all the people you can

As long as ever you can.

**1 Peter 2:12 (NIV)** **12Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.**

We are called to: Live such good lives among the pagans, Live such good lives among the world in which we live, that, even though they accuse us of doing wrong, and even if those accusations are completely false, they may still see and recognize our good deeds and glorify God because of them..

Dorothy Canfield Fisher once wrote about a physically powerful but dimwitted farm hand named Lem who lived in a Vermont valley. His mother resented him from the day he was born. She often ridiculed him with harsh and demeaning words. Even so, the boy served her till she died. Lem was the target of village jokes. But then one night he came upon a huge dog killing some farmer's sheep. Using his bare hands as his only weapon, he strangled the dog to death. When morning came, the villagers discovered the dog was really a giant timber wolf.

Lem quickly earned the villagers' silent admiration.

Later, an unwed village girl falsely accused Lem of being the father of her baby. Even though he was innocent he married the girl so the baby would have a father. Unfortunately, the mother died within a year, so Lem raised the little girl. After she was grown and married, her own baby became desperately ill and Lem sold all his sheep to pay for the baby's medical care.

Confronted with meanness, misunderstanding, and loneliness all his life, Lem, rather than living out the frustrations and unfairness of his own life chose to live

out his life serving others. He chose to live out his life as a walking sermon…

The loudest message that we will ever speak is the life that we live.

The most powerful sermons that our lives will ever speak often will come from how we handle, not the good times, but how we handle the bad times, our times of adversity, trial and tribulation.

The effect of the Christian life lived out in difficult situations is often quite dramatic and forceful in its impact on the non-Christian world.

So Paul says: **12Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God!**

Some of the most powerful sermons that I have ever heard have been accounts people have given of adversity in their life and how they were able to handle it as a Christian…

As an English medical doctor in Africa for 30 years, Helen Rosavere wondered about the problems facing the developing African nations all around her.

The trouble began when insurgents from bordering countries started a rebel movement in Helen’s area. Some rebels, high on drugs, attacked the village where Dr. Rosavere was staying. They took over the hospital, seized Helen, and held her hostage.

At the time, Helen was in her fifties and had never been married. She had given her life, first to the Lord, and then to the people of Africa. The rebels repeatedly raped her. In the midst of it all, in the blackest moment of the violent incident, Helen cried out, “Why Lord? How can You let this happen?

But the answer came quickly, thank you Helen, for giving your life to Me—For giving Me your body years ago. You see, Helen, they aren’t raping you. They are raping Me!

At that moment she felt the peace of God in a mighty way, but she still had to deal with the awful memories.

A few months after her release, Helen came to the United States to address some medical students at a university. When she was introduced, Helen walked up to the podium and noticed two girls sitting in the front row on the left side. Both were too young to be medical students. One of the girls stared intently at Helen, making her feel somewhat uncomfortable.

As Helen began her speech, God impressed upon her to tell the audience what had happened to her in Africa. Helen resisted because it had nothing to do with her delivery, but again she was impressed to relate the story about when she was raped. She began to tell of the incident as if it was a part of her presentation. Then she went on to finish her address.

When the lecture was over, Helen went to the back of the podium and noticed again the two girls on the left side. One approached Helen and said: Doctor, I’m sorry to bother you, but my 15-year-old sister over there was raped five weeks ago and hasn’t said a word or made a sound since then. She has seen ministers and psychologists, and none have helped. Could you talk with her for a few minutes?

Helen looked up and walked toward the girl. When she was about halfway, the girl stood up and ran toward Helen. When they reached each other, they embraced so hard that they crashed to the floor, crying.

After an hour of crying, the girl talked non-stop for two hours. She had found someone who could identify with her hurt…

What really happened here?

Helen allowed herself to be a sermon in shoe leather! By being willing to share a painful life experience with others she allowed her life experience to become a walking sermon to someone who desperately needed to hear that message..

How many of you have seen the movie “The Passion of the Christ”?

The movie is done in the original language with English subtitles. Mel Gibson, the maker of the film originally planned to do it in the original languages, Greek, Latin and Aramaic, without the use of English subtitles but gave in to pressure from others that the English subtitles were needed for English speaking audiences…..

The movie is about the last 13 hours of the life of Christ, the Passion of Christ---leading to the cross.

I feel the movie would have been just as effective, if not only the subtitles were removed, but you could have removed the soundtrack as well and it would still have had a powerful effect on the viewer!

Why? It shows the price that Jesus paid to redeem us from our sin in a very un-sanitized way. As the Pope is quoted to originally have said after viewing this movie---It is as it was..

It is as it was!

As brutal and violent as this movie is- And it is a very brutal and a very violent movie.

IT IS AS IT WAS!

This movie shows in a very graphic and brutal way the price that Jesus willingly paid for your and my sin.

I was thinking about this movie as I was working on the message for this week about our being sermons in shoe leather, our calling by God to be walking sermons.

As I thought back to those terribly brutal scenes in that movie as Christ was whipped and then led to the cross to be crucified, I had the thought that is exactly what the life of Christ was all about…

He was a sermon in shoe leather. He was a walking sermon.

How many times could you get the message from just watching Jesus actions? How many times would He have made His point without having to say a word?

I pictured the time that the Pharisees, in trying to trap Jesus, get Him to say something contrary to the law of Moses, brought a woman caught in the very act of adultery before Him….

**John 8:3 - 11 (NIV)**

**3The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group****4and said to Jesus, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery.****5In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?”****6They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.**

**But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger.****7When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.”****8Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.**

**9At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there.****10Jesus straightened up and asked her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?”**

**11“No one, sir,” she said.**

**“Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.”**

This was a powerful presentation of the word of God! This was a powerful illustration of the Gospel message!

And very few words were actually spoken by Jesus..

The words that He did speak were fully backed up by the life that He lived and that literally made His life a walking sermon..

Jesus showed the woman that he didn’t condemn her by his actions before he spoke a word..

Whenever Jesus knelt down to pray, he was being a walking sermon…

Whenever he lovingly picked up a small child, he was being a walking sermon…

Whenever he laid his hand on the physically infirm, he was being a walking sermon…

When he wept at Lazarus grave, He was being a walking sermon….

When he went into the home of a known sinner for fellowship, he was being a walking sermon.

As He was carrying His cross up the hill to Golgotha, he was a walking sermon…

As He hung there bleeding on that cross, he was being a walking sermon…

Jesus lived His life as a sermon in shoe leather and we have been called to live our lives as He lived His… In the good times of life and in the bad times of life!

Jesus said **“Take up your cross and follow Me!**

If you have seen the movie The Passion of the Christ, then I dare say you understand a lot better what Jesus was saying when He said take up your **cross** and follow Me….

Doug Nichols, shares how While serving with Operation Mobilization in India in 1967, tuberculosis forced him into a sanitarium for several months. He did not yet speak the language, but he tried to give Christian literature written in their language to the patients, doctors, and nurses. Everyone politely refused. He sensed many weren't happy about a rich American (to them all Americans are rich) being in a free, government-run sanitarium. (They didn't know he was just as broke as they were!)

The first few nights he said he woke around 2:00 A.M. coughing. One morning during his coughing spell, he noticed one of the older and sicker patients across the aisle trying to get out of bed. He would sit up on the edge of the bed and try to stand, but in weakness would fall back into bed. He didn't understand what he was trying to do.

The old man finally fell back into bed exhausted. Nichols said: I heard him crying softly.

The next morning I realized what the man had been trying to do. He had been trying to get up and walk to the bathroom! The stench in our ward was awful. Other patients yelled insults at the man. Angry nurses moved him roughly from side to side as they cleaned up the mess. One nurse even slapped him. The old man curled into a ball and wept. The next night he said I again woke up coughing. I noticed the man across the aisle sit up and again try to stand. Like the night before, he fell back whimpering.

Nichols said; I don't like bad smells, and I didn't want to become involved, but I got out of bed and went over to him. When I touched his shoulder, his eyes opened wide with fear. I smiled, put my arms under him, and picked him up.

He was very light due to old age and advanced TB. I carried him to the washroom, which was just a filthy small room with a hole in the floor. I stood behind him with my arms under his armpits as he took care of himself. After he finished, I picked him up, and carried him back to his bed. As I laid him down, he kissed me on the cheek, smiled, and said something I couldn't understand.

The next morning another patient woke me and handed me a steaming cup of tea. He motioned with his hands that he wanted a tract. As the sun rose, other patients approached and indicated they also wanted the booklets I had tried to distribute before. Throughout the day nurses, interns, and doctors asked for literature.

Weeks later an evangelist who spoke the language visited me, and as he talked to others, he discovered that several had put their trust in Christ as Savior as a result of reading the literature.

What did it take to reach these people with the gospel? It wasn't health, the ability to speak their language, or a persuasive talk. One man simply took a trip to the bathroom and allows his life to be a sermon in shoe leather.

**James 3:13 (NIV)** **13Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.**

**Matthew 5:14 - 16 (NIV)**

**14“You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 15Neither 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.****16In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.**

Are we living our lives as if we were a sermon in shoe leather?

Are we living our lives in Christ as a city on a hill that cannot be hidden?

Are we letting our light shine before men, that they may see our good deeds and praise our Father in heaven?

Is your life a walking sermon revealing the grace that God is working within you?

Have you come to the realization that your life and the way that you live it may very well be the only Bible that some people will ever see?