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Sharing the Good News Matthew 28:18-20

Over the years, hundreds, if not thousands of commissions, boards, and task forces have been established throughout state government to address various issues and problems. One of the most notable, recent examples was the task force created by the Governor last year to deal with problems facing the Public Employees Insurance Agency. These commissions are generally a group of people given official authorization to perform a specific task or duty. In His final words before ascending to Heaven Jesus gives His disciples and all believers a command to perform a specific task and the authority and power to do so. He establishes "The Great Commission" and tells us to "Go" and "make disciples of all the nations."

"All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you and lo, I am with you, always, even to the end of the age." Matthew 28: 18-20

Should we be surprised that this was the last thing Jesus said to us before He departed from this earth? Even before Jesus was born scripture tells us what His mission was to be:

***"She will bear a Son and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."
Matthew 1:21***

Jesus Himself tells us what His mission was and is:

"For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." (Luke 19:10)

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45)

For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him." (John 3:16-17)

Is the Great Commission an option for believers today? God gave His all to this mission, the greatest rescue mission of all time. Both God the Father and God the Son make a tremendous sacrifice to save us from the punishment our sin deserves, demonstrating their immeasurable love for us. Jesus made it His number one mission to reach the lost and He has not only called upon us to do the same, He has empowered us to do so.

***"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."
(Acts 1:8)***

In this passage of scripture Jesus is responding to a question from His apostles who were wanting to know when Israel was going to be freed from Roman

oppression and their kingdom restored. They were still thinking earthly kingdom and were looking for a great military and/or political leader to rescue them.

Jesus tells them not to worry about that, God has that under control.

Jesus instead tells them they need to be focused on the spiritual kingdom, the important kingdom they are called to establish in the hearts, minds and lives of believers. Jesus clearly tells them and us what our focus and mission will be, we are to be His witnesses.

Your Testimony Matters

"Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved. How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things!" (Romans 10:13-15)

How can non-believers hear about Jesus unless someone tells them? All of us know of the importance of being a good example, of modeling the Christian life to be an effective witness. That is called lifestyle evangelism. It is important to live a Godly life, but is that enough? Survey research has found that those who commit to Christ hear the Gospel an average of 5 to 7.6 times before they do so. Is the need or importance any more or less if you are the 1st or the 7th to share your faith?

As believers we are charged with the responsibility to be prepared and willing to share accurately and with conviction, the gospel of Jesus Christ.

***"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth."
(II Timothy 2:15)***

"Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction." (II Timothy 4:2)

In the preceding passage and in Romans 10:14 the word "preacher" and "preach" are used. How many believe that witnessing (sharing the gospel) is primarily the responsibility of our Pastors?

Would you be surprised to know that over 50% of all people who come to Christ do so through a friend or relative, someone with a close personal relationship with the individual? ¹

And yet as important as we are individually in spreading the gospel, we are falling short.

One study by the Oxford Center for Mission Studies found that 70% of those attending church one or more times a month never share their faith with anybody. And another study found that 64% of Christians today believe evangelizing is optional.² Before we disregard these findings, we should ask ourselves this question. When did I last share my faith with someone?

***"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."
(Romans 1:16)***

This scripture is cited in today's lesson not because of a belief that "being ashamed" of the gospel is our problem. It is placed here to emphasize what a great responsibility we have as followers of Christ to share our faith. There is only one thing that can deliver humanity from sin and the wrath of God, there is only one hope for escape from eternal punishment. There is only one way to eternal life, the Gospel, the power of God for salvation!

Knowing that truth we can't be ashamed, so what's the problem? For many of us it may be the fear and/or uncertainty of what might happen when we do share our faith.

So, let's look at what might happen.

Be Bold, Not Fearful of Rejection, Rejoice!

There are really only three possible things that can happen when we share our faith with others:

1. The person can hear us out and accept Jesus as their personal Savior and Lord. That is a good thing.
2. The person can hear us out and reject Jesus as their personal savior. That is not a good thing. And in that rejection, they may ridicule us, ostracize us, possibly even persecute us.
3. The person can hear us out and not make a decision. Is that a good or bad thing? It is a good thing because we have either planted a seed or we are contributing to the growth of a seed that has already been planted.

Let's go back to number 2. Yes, it is bad for the person who rejected the gospel but what does scripture tell us about the one who shared it?

"If you are reviled for the name of Christ you are blessed, because the Spirit of Glory and of God rests upon you." (I Peter 4:14)

What does Jesus say about being rejected?

"Blessed are ye when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets." (Luke 6:22-23)

"And I say to you, every one who confesses Me before men, the Son of Man will confess him also before the Angels of God." (Luke 12:8)

There is nothing to fear, there is no real loss when we share our faith, the only loss occurs when we don't.

Be Confident, Committed, Share your Faith

Hacksaw Ridge

The movie "Hacksaw Ridge" is based upon the true-life story of Private First-Class Desmond T. Doss. During the battle of Okinawa in World War II, private Doss risked his own life over and over again to save the lives of 75 of his fellow soldiers. He did this without ever firing a single shot, because he had no weapon. He had no weapon because he refused to bear arms on religious grounds, but he still desired to serve his country. For his bravery, Private Doss won the congressional medal of Honor. The rescue mission Private Doss undertook at Hacksaw Ridge was a daring and courageous one that saved many lives. But these

lives were only saved temporarily.

The Apostle Paul truly understands the value of eternal life and was willing to relinquish it that others might know Christ.

"I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh."
(Romans 9: 1-3)

In this passage of scripture, the Apostle Paul tells us how important it is to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He is in essence saying, "I would give up my own salvation for your salvation. I would go to hell, give up eternal life, lose my own personal relationship with Jesus, for someone else to believe and be saved".³

Private Doss risked his life to save many, the Apostle Paul was willing to give up eternal life to bring others to salvation. But it was Jesus Christ who completed the ultimate rescue mission dying on the Cross that we might have eternal life. It is a rescue mission that is not optional for His followers to be a part of. In Matthew 4:19 Jesus tells His disciples. ***"Follow me and I will make you fishers of men."***

In other words, if you are going to follow, you are going to have to fish!

Today, approximately 7,452 people will die in the United States (one person every 12 seconds). Think about that. Have you ever wondered where they might spend eternity?

And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned."
(Mark 16: 15-16)

To use a football metaphor, if you are a high school football player hoping to someday play in the NFL, you should know that you have a .02% chance of making it. If you are a college player your odds are better but not by much, you have a 1.6% chance of making it to the big league.

If you do not believe in Jesus Christ and accept Him as your personal Savior and Lord, you have a zero percent chance of going to Heaven and a 100% assurance of spending eternity in Hell. You are condemned!

Shouldn't we be dead serious and committed to leading others to Christ

As disciples (followers) of Christ we have been appointed by God to a commission and it is our duty to recognize that:

- The Gospel must be heard
- It is our responsibility to be prepared and share the Gospel at all times
- We must overcome our fear or any obstacle that prevents us from witnessing for Christ
- We always rejoice and embrace our role in sharing the Gospel

Saving the lost was Jesus' primary mission on earth, it should be ours as well.

"If sinners will be damned at least let them leap to hell over our bodies. And if they will perish, let them perish with our arms about their knees, imploring them to stay. If Hell must be filled, at least let it be filled in the teeth of our exertions and let not one go there unwarned or unprayed for. I would sooner bring one sinner to Jesus Christ, than unravel all the mysteries of the divine word, for salvation is the one thing we are to live for." Charles Haddon Spurgeon

¹ American Culture and Faith Institute (ACFI) research developed by George Barna

² Study by the Barna Group in partnership with " Lutheran Hour Ministries"

³ From Sermon by James Merritt

Parts of this study adapted from "One Thing You Can't Do In Heaven" by Mark Cahill

Capitol Bible Studies
Thursdays

8:00 AM House Gov. Org (East Wing)
12:00 PM Senate Pres. Conf. Room