

## THE GREAT COMMISSION - "What About Me?"

The past couple of weeks we have considered the fact that all Christ followers – in one way or another – are called to be “missionaries.” We also gave attention to the idea of being “witnesses” – even “martyrs” for Christ. That’s actual word found in Luke’s account of the events following the resurrection of our Lord. We read there that **Jesus had this to say** to His most dedicated disciples.

**(Luke 24:46-48) “This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in (my) name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.” (Acts 1:7) “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses to the ends of the earth.”**

Though we may not have received the call first hand as the twelve did – or been empowered in quite the same way, we all have the responsibility to do what we can to advance the proclamation of the gospel. After all, Matthew’s account records that Jesus told His apostles to teach us to observe all things that He had commanded them. That includes “going and making” more disciples. (28:18-20)

But, what about us? In practical terms what does this all mean for you and me? **For me**, I’m pledging to financially support Calvary’s missions here and abroad. Lord willing, I’ll keep preaching here on Sunday mornings and teaching classes on Sunday nights and Wednesdays. Yet, most of that isn’t going out into the world, so much as expecting the world to come to me. I’m committing to keep sharing Jesus at Kids’ Club at Thomson Elementary on Tuesdays and preaching regularly to those who come to chapel at Carpenter’s Place and the Rescue Mission. I’m also planning to accompany others to share the good news in Haiti on a VBS / medical mission trip in June. All of this is good – but it still leaves a lot of territory uncovered between the pulpit and the “ends of the earth.”

And **what about you?** Will you also support missions with your finances? Will you personally get involved in teaching at the church? Will you volunteer to get into the trenches in our community, helping to serve meals for the homeless and hurting or assisting with our local outreaches in the neighborhood? Would you be open to a short term mission overseas? On an even more personal level, how about speaking to your neighbor? Or sharing your testimony with a co-worker or a classmate? How about handing out literature along with candy on Halloween? If you’d like some, come see me after services.

Bottom line is that we all need to be more proactive – not just doing what we’ve been doing but stretching beyond our present borders, be they physical or spiritual. I’ve stressed to our Mission Ministry that unless the local church not only survives, but thrives, our ability to support missions abroad will be hindered. I personally know of churches which once supported missionaries overseas that no longer exist. They withered and died. That’s sad, Sadder still is that the light they once projected into their communities has gone out. Why?

Consider that after complimenting the church in Ephesus on being doctrinally sound, maintaining a level of purity, and doing good things, Jesus had this to say: **“I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.” (Revelation 2:4-5)** What was their first love? And what were they no longer doing that they once did? Some say the issue was evangelism, and that seems legitimate. But it is the reason why they weren’t doing what they should’ve been doing that is being addressed here. They didn’t “love” the way they once did. Think about it...

Were you ever more **excited about your salvation** than you are today? I can recall how I approached some friends at school the day after I accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior. I told them I'd been saved and was now a Christian. Looking back, most of them thought I was nuts – at least one told me as much. Others wondered what the big deal was since they believed they were already Christians because they went to church with their parents on Sunday. When I told them, I was just baptized into Christ, some looked at me strangely saying their parents had them baptized as babies. How come my parents were just getting around to it? That started a debate about the difference between believer's baptism and christening of infants. I wasn't the most proficient in telling people about what Jesus had done for me – matter of fact, my testimony was more about what I had done than what Jesus had done for me – but I was excited about being saved and I wanted to tell the world. David once wrote, **“Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn back to you.”** (Psalm 51:12-13) This is my prayer for you and me as well.

Were you ever more **enthusiastic about your worship** than you are today? I recall looking forward to going to church, singing hymns and learning from God's word. I missed it when I couldn't go. I invited people to come to church, and some did. To be honest sometimes I was so concerned about the mode of worship that I missed the mood. Jesus said *“the kind of worshippers God seeks”* worship Him in both *“Spirit and truth.”* (John 4:24) However you interpret that, worship that is so focused on form that it lacks adoration isn't worship at all. I can honestly tell you that I have never been more enthusiastic about my worship than I am today. It's not because of the style of music, but because of a deeper appreciation for God and what He has done for me in Christ. Understanding the freedom that I have to express my heart to God is also a factor - knowing that I can say *“amen”* or *“praise the Lord”* in our assembly - that I can sit or stand or raise my hands or even fall to my knees if so moved by the fuller revelation of Jesus. And the discovery that my worship is not limited to what takes place on Sunday mornings opened the door for me to do all the above as I walk through life. Paul wrote in Romans 12:1-2: **“I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship.”**

Were you ever more **passionate in your witness** than you are today? If passion was all I needed, as I young preacher, I had plenty. You would've thought that I was under the impression that I could win the world for Jesus. Well, if not the whole world, I was pretty sure I could at least impact a significant part of my world. Of course, the Bible says that **“zeal without knowledge”** is often misguided and unfruitful. (Proverbs 19:2; Romans 10:2) So I went to seminary to learn as much as I could so I'd have the right answers to all the crazy questions people tend to ask. Since then, I've read the Bible from cover to cover many times and waded through countless books and commentaries, and sat at the feet of some who I considered to be among the greatest bible scholars in the world. Yet, approaching my studies purely academically only caused my passion to fade. Sometimes I ended up with more questions than answers. Other times the answers were pat and simple, but unsatisfying.

Yet, when I opened my heart to truly seek God and to consider Jesus, the more that changed. The woman at the well didn't have a lot of Bible knowledge, but when she realized that Jesus was the Christ – and that despite her sordid past He offered her *“living water”* - she ran and told everybody she met. (John 4:28) Similarly, the more I comprehended the love and grace of God, the more I grew in my affection for Him. The more I understood the mercy of the cross, the more my appreciation for Jesus increased. And that proves to be the case still today.

I can honestly say I am more excited about my salvation, enthusiastic in my worship, and passionate for the Gospel than I have ever been. No wonder that is what **Paul prayed** for the church in Ephesus...

**“Ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints,<sup>16</sup> I’ve not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.<sup>17</sup> I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better.<sup>18</sup> I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints,<sup>19</sup> and His incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of His mighty strength,<sup>20</sup> which He exerted in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms,<sup>21</sup> far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.<sup>22</sup> And God placed all things under His feet and appointed Him to be head over everything for the church,<sup>23</sup> which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way. (1:15-23)**

Perhaps something I’ve shared in this lesson has convicted you. Maybe you realize now that you haven’t been expressing your love for God as you once did. If so, Jesus Himself calls you to repent – just as He did the Ephesians. But, listen carefully.

In practical terms, if I told you needed to *“return to your first love”*, you probably wouldn’t think I meant that you just needed to love someone more - but that you needed to restore the relationship. I believe that’s what is meant here. God loved you first and best. Though you may have left Him, He has not left you. The same guy who recorded Jesus’ words in **Revelation 2**, also wrote this in **1<sup>st</sup> John 4:10**: **“This is love – not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His son Jesus as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”** Return to your first true love. Return to Jesus.