

CHRIST'S COMMISSION.....OUR MISSION

Scripture Reading – John 20:19-23 –

The key verse is John 20:21 *“As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”*

Introduction

Jesus said to His disciples in John 20:21 *“As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”* James Montgomery Boice points out that this is John's version of the great commission. The great commission occurs five times in the New Testament - once, at the end of the four Gospels, and once, in the opening chapter of Acts. It is significant because it is repeated.

Anything that God says is important; if it is repeated more than once, then it has a special importance. Let us fix our attention on these words, *“As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”* We must look at the context in which this commission is set. Jesus had just risen from the dead. The authorities thought that they had rid themselves of Him. What they did not know that in all of the seeming tragedy of the Cross, was that God had not been stopped by the crucifixion. Death was brushed aside. Sin and its power was defeated. The Calvary event was not the end. God was marching on and His Son arose from the grave. He took the Cross, the instrument of death, and made it the instrument of redeeming power. Nothing could stop Him now. The Father had sent Him to be the perfect provision for the sins of the world. He had procured salvation for all men. This is the mission His Father had given Him, and now He commissions us to reach out to the world for which He died with the message of salvation purchased at such a price. It is the risen Jesus who challenged His followers. They had locked the doors of the place where they had

gathered for fear of the Jews, but Jesus appeared to them anyway. As we look at this group of Christ's followers in this locked room there are some lessons we can learn, and some warnings we can take about our responsibility of reaching the world for the Lord Jesus Christ. What is clear, is that this task is not an option for the church of Jesus Christ.

The first thing I see here is,

1. THE CHURCH RETREATING. John 20:19.

John tells us that the disciples had gathered in a room and they locked the doors for fear of the Jews. This was the church in hiding. As far as they were concerned the man on whom they had pinned their hopes as the promised Messiah was finished. His borrowed tomb was sealed with a Roman seal. For three years Jesus had prepared them to carry out His mission. They had sensed the urgency of His Spirit. They were conscious of His compassionate heart and they had felt the dynamic impact of His life giving teaching. Now He was gone and they felt that there was nothing left for them to do. Fear gripped their hearts and so they hid behind closed doors. I suggest that this is a picture of,

a. The Church Crippled. John 20:19. The church gripped by fear behind closed doors is crippled. **These disciples felt that if the Jews crucified their Lord and their Master, what would keep them from crucifying His followers.**

The world was an unfriendly hostile place for Him. All through His life He had lived through the storms of bitter hostility that reached its climax in His death on the cross. The religious leaders seized Him and the howling mob demanded His

death. He was beaten and crowned with thorns and died in the horrors of a brutal and bloody crucifixion. The world system is in direct opposition to Jesus, that is why it eventually crucified Him. That opposition has not changed. There may not be literal crosses today, nevertheless Christians are being martyred for their faith in Christ in other parts of the world. Opposition has not changed. The Christ of the Calvary road is not concerned with accommodating to the world system simply because it is popular and the crowd is going that way. The world system is in opposition to all the Jesus stood for and eventually died for. Jesus recognized this opposition. He said that the "World hates me because I testify that it what it does is evil." John 7:7. And again "if the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first." John 15:18. The early disciples feared that hate and hostility and hid behind closed doors. This was a picture of the crippled church. Furthermore the church behind closed doors was not only crippled it was

b. The Church Confined. John 20:19. There is not much that the church can do for the world behind closed doors. Any activity would be

totally restricted to the confined space of a small room. There is no danger in that kind of confinement, no risk in that restricted area and no challenge within the four walls of locked room. If the church is not prepared to look beyond herself, and move out into society to meet the desperate need confronting her, she will develop a closet type ministry.

Moreover, there are those within the Christian who may feel that there is too much agony out there and too many contrary people who give us pain and problems. **Maybe they feel that there is too much dirt and evil out there, and**

it is too uncomfortable beyond the four walls of the sanctuary. And all too often many Christians are content to live behind closed doors because it is not only safe, but also because it is a comfort zone. Let us remember that the cross for Jesus was not a comfortable experience. He suffered the most excruciating agony for our salvation – He bore the most repulsive burden (your sin and my sin) for our emancipation - Indeed He paid the highest price for our redemption. So His challenging words cannot be ignored. “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” John 20 :21. He commissions His church to move out of her comfort zone into a rough hostile world. It is that kind of world that needs to hear that the “gospel of Jesus Christ is the power of God for the salvation of everyone one who believes.” Romans 1:16. The church confined to four walls cannot fulfill Christ’s commission. Jesus says to His church “I have risen from the dead And have been I have been given all authority on earth and in heaven. He offers that authority to His followers. When the power of the living Christ rests on His church, there is no reason for her to fear, retreat or confine herself to four walls. Jesus says “As the Father has sent me so send I you.” This is Christ’s commission to His redeemed people and His commission is now our mission. The authentic church of Jesus Christ is never in retreat. She will never let four walls hinder her from fulfilling Christ’s commission

Now as we move with flow of this story we there comes to the church a transforming moment. The church in retreat becomes

2. THE CHURCH REJUVENATED. John 20:19-22.

When Jesus came into that locked room and revealed Himself to terrified disciples a great change took place in their lives. Jesus appeared to them and said “Peace be with you!” And after he said this He showed them His hands and His side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. What a transformation took place when Jesus came on the scene. But what was it that rejuvenated the disciples? What did Jesus do to rally His followers. When Jesus appeared their fear was replaced with joy. What happened behind those closed doors? Why all of a sudden this new joy in their hearts. It was the presence of Jesus that changed the attitude of the disciples. There was something about His person that brought rejoicing and peace to their hearts. When Jesus came to His disciples, He came to them as ,

a. The Reassuring Christ. John 20:18-21. His presence was the strength and foundation of their joy. He was the reason for their rejoicing. Their fear evaporated in the consciousness of His Presence, and this joy was reinforced by two powerful reassuring statements. **“Peace be with you.” The fact that it was stated twice gives some indication as to its significance in this encounter with His disciples. We know that in that culture it was a common greeting.** It seems, however, that Jesus meant something deeper than simple greeting. Note the full text says, “Peace be with you. As my Father has sent me, so I am sending you.” This is no coincidence. The reason is clear. Boice pointed out that we ourselves must have peace, both inwardly and outwardly, before we can effectively spread the message of the gospel of peace

to others. There are two kinds of peace spoken about in this gospel. There is first "Peace with God." Naturally man is at war with God and Jesus died to reconcile us to God. Peace with God was achieved by the death of Jesus on the Cross. Paul himself wrote that "Christ has made peace through the blood of the Cross." Colossians 1:20. The price of this peace was His blood shed on the Cross for you and me. The war is over and man can be restored to a living relationship and personal relationship with a Holy God. He can now experience peace with God.

The second peace is the "peace of God," which is a gift of God. The disciples cowering in the locked room were assured of His peace. On one occasion Jesus promised His followers, "My peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give as the world gives." John 14:27. John Stott said of this passage of scripture "The church's first need, before it can engage in evangelism, is an experience and an assurance of Christ's peace of conscience through His death that banishes sin - peace of mind through His resurrection that banishes doubt." Two issues had had to be dealt with before they could reach out to the lost of the world. They had to make peace with God receiving the forgiveness of sin and thereby canceling their guilt., Their fear would be then be dispelled. In addition to this, peace as God's gift would fill their hearts. The dynamic witnessing church must experience peace with God through Jesus Christ, and possess the peace of God as His gift to us. This had to be settled before they could be a strong witness in the world. Jesus appeared to His disciples and reassured them of His peace. He was the reassuring Jesus,

He also revealed Himself as,

b. The Redeeming Christ. John 20:19-23. “He showed them His hands and His feet.” Those scars were a testimony to His authority as a Savior. They are His indisputable credentials that qualify Him to be the redeemer of the world. They speak of His suffering, but the suffering Christ had become the saving Jesus. Well you might ask, “How can He be a redeemer with all of those imperfections in His Body?” Are they not a sign of weakness? But it is those imperfections, those scars that are the eloquent testimony of His power to rescue souls from the power and guilt of sin. Those scars are a witness to a fierce conflict fought and a resounding victory won. These disciples were rejuvenated because Jesus revealed Himself as the redeeming Christ. But they were rejuvenated because He appeared as,

c. The Risen Christ. John 20:20. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. The reason for their joy is obvious. The Jesus that thought was dead was visibly and tangibly alive. The victim they saw on the cross was alive. A few days before this incident they wondered what possible good could come out of the man on the Cross. Now He appears in the flesh to strengthen and comfort them. This was very important. If his enemies could not subdue Him - who could? “If sin could not destroy Him - what could?” If death could not stop Him - what could? If Satan and all of his forces could not defeat him - what could? This man Jesus is invincible. He is the mighty triumphant conqueror! He said that gates of Hades could not prevail against His church, and He told His disciples before left to return to His Father. “All authority in heaven and in earth

has been given to me.” Since this is true, who would not serve and follow Him to the gates of hell? He is the head of the Church who has completely defeated and deposed all of His enemies. The Lord of the church is alive and it is He who gives her power to reach the world. It was important that these followers of Jesus know that He had risen from the dead and be reassured that He has power over all things. Now Jesus having done this, makes clear that the church retreating and rejuvenated, is to be,

3. THE CHURCH RESPONSIBLE. John 20:21-23.

Jesus said in verses 21-23, “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you. And with that He breathed on them and said, Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.” Jesus is saying at least two things here. He is saying that the responsible church is,

a. The Church Equipped and Enabled. John 20:22. Jesus said to his disciples, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” Many have been puzzled by this command because Jesus told His disciples that the Holy Spirit would come upon them after He had returned to heaven. And the Acts of the Apostles makes quite clear that it was after Jesus sat down on right of the Sovereignty of God, that He sent the Holy Spirit to His church. Bible scholars have suggested that this was a prophetic breathing. In other words it was a prophecy tied together with a promise. It was symbolic and suggestive. But in addition to this, it is clear that there were two important truths that Jesus laid down for His people and His mission in the world.

i. He emphasized the absolute necessity of the Presence of the Holy Spirit in the life and the mission of the Church.

ii. He revealed in this act that the secret of the church's power lies in the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit. The word "breathed" in v.21 is the same word used in Genesis 2:7, when God breathed the breathe of life into man and he became a living being. The point is that the church is dead without the presence of the Holy Spirit. **When the church possesses the fullness of the Holy Spirit, she is infused with new life – new energy and new power to propagate the gospel across our communities. Jesus said to His disciples that they would receive power after the Holy Spirit would come upon them, and they would be witnesses. (see Acts 1:8) The word of God strongly declares that it is "not by power nor by might but by my Spirit says the Lord Almighty." Zech. 4:6.** The greatest need in the church today is for each Child of God to be filled with the Holy Spirit. When Jesus talks about reaching the world you cannot get past His concern that before we do so, we be filled with His Spirit. **This is of first importance! This is basic and it is not an option. If the church is to make an impact upon our world it will only do so in the power of the Holy Spirit, and so this is where we begin. This is what must be settled first, otherwise we will fail. You cannot do God's work without His power. This sounds somewhat simplistic in our technological world.** But we have been given a supernatural task, and we need a supernatural power to do it. We can have the best and most recent ministries and methods of church growth, but if we do not have the power of the presence of God upon us

everything we do is futile. We do not need the Holy Spirit to run ministries. They can run by themselves. But the real work of the Church must have the glory of the presence of the Holy Spirit upon it. It is when the Holy Spirit comes, that the Church is equipped and enabled to do God's will and work effectively. The scriptures make clear that God will not give us the Spirit of timidity, but the Spirit of power. (see 2 Tim. 1:7.) When Jesus said to His disciples "receive the Holy Spirit" what He literally said was "to take the Holy Spirit." This is His offer! This is His gift! Have we received it? Finally the church responsible is,

b. The Church Committed and Commissioned. John 20:21. Jesus said to His followers "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." There is no mistaking of what Jesus meant by this command. He was on a mission to save the world. That was His high purpose and it involved a complete commitment to the cross, for "He was obedient to death, even the death of the cross." (see Philippians 2:8) In view of this Jesus says, "As the Father has sent me even so I am sending you." This means that the measure of their commitment should match the measurement of His commitment to save souls. There may not be a Roman cross in our future, but the same quality of surrender to God's will is required, if the world is to hear of the saving grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Then Jesus makes a startling statement in verse 23. "If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; and if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." What does this mean" Can the church forgive sins? The position of the scriptures is that only God can forgive sins. So what does Jesus mean here? Research and a study of these words reveal that it does not mean the Church

has the authority to forgive sins. What is meant here is that the church has been given the authority to proclaim the forgiveness of sins. The church has the right and the power to say to any one if you repent and trust Jesus as your Savior and surrender to His Lordship, your sins will be forgiven. But it also has the right and the authority to say, "if you do not fulfill these conditions, you will not be forgiven." What is crucial is that the church has been given the authority to declare that there is forgiveness and cleansing in and through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. The church has the authority to proclaim the message of hope and redemption. Indeed that is our challenge and responsibility, because this is Christ's commission and Christ's commission is our mission.

Conclusion

It is amazing that Jesus has entrusted the spreading of the Gospel paid for at such infinite cost to a group of His disciples. And Jesus has entrusted the spreading of this gospel to us. We are to be His instruments through which this incredible gospel is declared. The challenge is great! The task is enormous! The responsibility is tremendous! We have received so much from the hand of God. We have received freely of His grace and so we are to freely give. We are a redeemed people and therefore a blest privileged people. Christ has commissioned us to evangelize and if we don't "evangelize we will fossilize." God's Son did not die that His church be reduced to a fossil. He died that we might be an energized dynamic redemptive instrument in His Hands and under His anointing. How do we do this? Leith Anderson tells how. "A couple years ago his nephew asked if he had read John Grisham's new book. Leith replied

that he had never heard of John Grisham. His nephew urged him to read his book called "the firm." Leith went on to say that he had never heard nor had he seen it reviewed. It wasn't on any lists. So he went out and bought it to keep his nephew happy. At least he could tell him that he had bought it. He started to read and he read it straight through. John Grisham had written an earlier book entitled "Time To Kill." It sold just 5000 copies in hard cover. It seemed that it was not advertised, or ever made a list or was reviewed by anyone that he knew of. It was sort of a flop. Then he wrote "the Firm," and it wasn't advertised either. It was hardly reviewed, and the reviews it got weren't very good. But people read it and liked it and told other people that they liked it and "THE FIRM" sold seven million copies. It has been made into a film starring Tom Cruise, who ever he is. I suppose you know who he is. John Grisham has written several other books, and today the number-one paperback best seller in the United States is by John Grisham, as are the number-two and number-three. And the number-one hardcover best seller is by John Grisham. That has never happened before in history. And it is not because of advertising, and not because of the publisher's clever marketing plan, but because somebody liked the book. I guess a lot of people liked the book and told other people, until millions of these books were sold. So much of the church today is caught up and hooked on clever marketing plans and expensive gimmicks to reach the lost. Our ministries are becoming more and more influenced and controlled by the marketing world. But we are people who not only like Jesus but also love Him. When a young man falls in love with his fiancé, he does not need the latest marketing methods to channel

explain and demonstrate his love for her. It is love itself that constrains him and compels him to tell and demonstrate His love for her. It is his love that motivates his pursuit of her. If we love Jesus and have experienced Him, and if we have freely received of His grace, then it is because of this grace that we will tell others about it. It does not take a newspaper ad. It does not need a review in a fashionable magazine. It does not need the latest marketing methods to witness. We witness to what we have experienced. Evangelism is people who have fallen in love with Jesus and know Him as their Savior telling other people, until it spreads throughout our community. Jesus said as the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” What is your response?