

Matthew 28:18-20 "Jesus First" Series
Communion Sunday January 24, 2010

Jesus First: A Passionate Mission Part I

¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

In the movie, Evan Almighty, Evan Baxter runs for Congress on a campaign promise that together, he and his supporters will "change the world." But when Evan gets to Congress, the only world that seems to change is his own: he gets a new car, a new house, and a shiny new office. But God decides to take Evan at his word, and recruits him to change the world -- it's just that God has His own idea of what that means. Evan, wisely, decides to get on board. The problem with the movie is that God decided to destroy the world because humankind didn't take care of the environment. There is no doubt that God wants us to care for the creation. He put us in charge from the time He placed Adam in the Garden of Eden. And ever since sin entered the world, we have not done a very good job. God is still concerned about our physical world, and Christians have an obligation to honor our stewardship. But God is even more concerned about humans. Jesus said that God cares more for us than for the lilies of the field or the sparrows in the sky.

God is still extending His hand, seeking co-laborers in His work. The question is: Do we share His priorities? God wants to save the world. God has not been shy about revealing His intentions. In the Great Commission, Jesus tells His followers to go into the world and "make disciples." He compares people to ripe fields, and his followers to those who labor in those fields "gathering fruit for life eternal."

Paul describes Christians as God's "fellow workers." If you were waiting for God to draw you a picture, He already has. Knowing that the time is always short, we need to make the most of it. None of us know how long anyone has to live. But we have only this life to decide to repent of our sins and follow Christ.

Believers need to set aside anything which might be a distraction from engaging in God's priorities. God wants to change the world.

Over the last month in this “Jesus First” Series we learned about the Identity of Christ as SAVIOR who died on the cross so that the curse of sin would be removed for those who believe in him. We learned about the identity of Christ as GOD and human. Last Sunday: Jesus, we learned that Christ is the MODEL for humanity, teaching us how to live and care for one another.

This morning, we will explore the fact that JESUS IS WITH US ALWAYS. The text today is usually related to mission and evangelism. But focus on the last verse: “**And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.**” Next week, we will explore his MISSION as explained in this same passage. I don’t want to minimize the main message of this text which is where God calls us to bring Good News to the world. That’s next week. But this morning, I want to focus on just that last phrase because sometimes we need to be reminded that Christ is with us. Sometimes as individuals, we feel like we’ve been abandoned on this planet by our creator and left alone to fend for ourselves. When crisis comes, we have to face it ourselves. This is simply not the case.

Jesus offers us a great promise to the disciples who were distraught to see Jesus leave. In John 14:1-6 Jesus tells them not to be troubled because he is preparing a place for them. Of all the characteristics of Jesus, two should stand out to us: First, he brings to us salvation. That was his primary reason for his entering into the flesh and living and dying for us. A second characteristic is his *omnipresence* (he is everywhere). After his resurrection, he reminds his disciples that he will be with them always. It’s why we speak of Christ in the present tense, because he was raised from the dead, he remains with us by his spirit.

He promised he would never leave us nor forsake us. I doubt the disciples understood this fully when he said it and even as he was ascending into heaven. I have a feeling they still thought, “**Well, that’s it. He’s gone!**” It wasn’t until the Holy Spirit entered and filled them with power and insight, that they understood the implications of “**And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.**”

Let me clarify. In John 16:7, Jesus said, “⁷**But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not**

come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.” This is confusing to some people. If Jesus said he is going to be with us always, then why did he leave? See, Christ in the flesh was limited by the flesh, but in the spirit, Christ was the complete manifestation of God and was omniscient and Omnipresent. He was all-knowing and all present. In other words, just as he had entered the flesh to be WITH them, he would need to leave the flesh to REMAIN with them forever.

When Jesus was in the flesh, he traveled from place to place and was limited by distance and time. Now that he is in the spirit, he is with us always and is not limited by time, distance or circumstances. When the Lutheran seminarian, Benjamin Larson, was dying inside a dormitory in Haiti following the earthquake, he was singing praises to God as he was dying. Those outside said he was not alone. I have no doubt that he was not alone. Jesus said, “**And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.**” All of this added up means that he is with us always. His spirit dwells within us. He gives us peace and confidence and we’re not walking it alone.

We often talk about Jesus in past tense. We mention him as if he no longer exists. But the fact is, you can have a relationship with him. He is as close as your prayers. He wants to listen to your needs. I am a big fan of Fannie Crosby, the great hymn writer of the late 19th Century. Fannie Crosby hymns quite often speak of that intimacy. At the age of six weeks, she contracted an eye infection and a man claiming to be a doctor put a mustard plaster on her eyes which caused her to go blind. She spent her life writing some of the most powerful hymns in our hymnal. Each hymn reflects the amazing intimacy she had with Christ. My favorite Hymn is “Blessed Assurance.” Another one she wrote that alluded to her blindness is “Saved by Grace” where the chorus reads, “*And I shall see Him face to face, And tell the story Saved by grace;*”

She said later in life that if she were offered eyesight, she would refuse it because the many new and glorious things around her might distract her from that deep relationship she had always had with Christ, which she was able to enjoy because of her blindness. What carried her through life is what sustains us and brings us joy and nearness to Christ—Knowing that we never walk alone.

Conclusion...

Do you struggle with having a deep intimacy with Christ? I wish I could say there is a pill you can take or an easy equation to solve this distance. It is really not much different than maintaining a relationship with a close friend or a spouse. We have to spend time together and stay in close communication or the relationship begins to become cold and stale.

It is the same with Christ. We can not always rely on feelings. Sometimes I don't FEEL close to my wife or my friends. Sometimes I don't FEEL close to Christ. So scripture verses like today's text reminds me **"Low, I am with you always, even until the end of the world."**

His closeness can not always be a FEELNG, but it is a fact. He never leaves us nor forsakes us. That's a fact. Know that when we aren't feeling close to Jesus, Jesus is still close to us. AMEN.