

Matthew 28:18-20

Last in the series on JESUS FIRST

January 31, 2010

### A Passionate Mission: Part II

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

<sup>19</sup> 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,

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

It was three football fields long. Eleven stories tall, ninety-two feet wide and she tipped the scales at 46,000 tons. She was the largest and most luxurious ship ever built. The pride of the Whitestar Shipping Line was valued at 1912 currency at 7.5 million dollars. This ship, fit for a king, could carry 3,000 passengers and crew. She had her own swimming pool, suites, restaurants, Turkish baths and squash courts. With 16 watertight compartments, she was deemed unsinkable. But the Titanic was not unsinkable.

After striking an Iceberg in the North Atlantic, the ship sank in just under three hours. Tragically, only 700 of the 2300 people aboard survived. But what is even more tragic is the fact that a lot of people could have been saved, but weren't. Of the 20 lifeboats lowered into the water, only a couple were filled to capacity. Several were half full and a few had only a handful of passengers rather than the capacity of 60 that they had been tested for.

After the ship broke apart and sank, hundreds of people floated in open water in life jackets near the 20 lifeboats. Only one of the 20 lifeboats went back in search of other survivors. The other lifeboats remained at a distance, comforting each other, grateful to be alive. All the while, hundreds of people died within range of sight. Not by drowning, but from hypothermia. In many ways, the church has become those in the lifeboat. We have the safety and security of having been rescued from the danger of being lost. Yet around us can be heard the cries of those still in danger. Too often, our answer is to hold up a sign, "Rescue available here." We say to the world, "Come this direction, there's room for you here." But some need more than a sign, they need a ladder or a hand up. In many ways, the church has lost its lifesaving ability. We've become adept at entertainment and self-help, but we've lost the knack for rescue.

Perhaps we've underestimated the danger. We have forgotten about the place called HELL. The Bible is clear that there are two paths toward eternity. One leads to life and one leads to death. One leads to heaven, the other to hell. Some theologians as well as Hollywood movie scripts have reduced heaven to a place where good people go and hell is reserved for only the worst of people. Some ask, "What kind of a loving God would send people to a place of extreme suffering? But in the face of this confusion, the Bible is more clear about the matter than are the theologians. Romans 3:23 says **"<sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,"** That means you and I are both born with this curse of sin and our eternal destination is automatically death. Romans 6:23 says **"the wages of sin is DEATH, BUT the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."**

As Christians, we know this. We grew up in Sunday School with this message of heaven and hell. But we are influenced by our culture. We are at a funeral and hear the speaker say that "John treated people well so he is in heaven." OR "Jane greeted everyone with a warm smile, so she is in heaven." We have reduced heaven to a place where nice people go.

Don't get me wrong. It is not up to me to decide whether John or Jane is in heaven. That is by God's grace (Gift) only. I don't determine that. I am simply relating to you what the Bible says about heaven and hell. The Bible tells us that heaven is for those who are redeemed by God's grace. The formula is clearly given in Acts 16:31 **"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved."** Paul reiterates this throughout his writings such as Ephesians 2:8-9, <sup>8</sup> **For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- <sup>9</sup> not by works, so that no one can boast.**

So what we find is that there is a God who clearly gives us a choice and there are consequences to that choice. We can either choose to follow him by faith, or we can reject him and live our lives the way we want. However, with every choice there are also consequences and according to Paul "The wages of sin is death." For those who are separated from God because they chose to ignore his free gift of freedom from sin – the result will be eternal judgment of hell. Is it nice? No, not really. Is it fair and just? Absolutely. I want to make this clear before we move on because that affects the way we reach the world. As Christians, we have LOST the passion to share the good news of Christ to the world because in our minds, hell is no big deal. We have muddied the water because we have resorted to believing what people think rather than looking at what God thinks. We are reminded that **"Faith comes by hearing, and hearing**

**by the word of God.”** (Romans 10:17) Which means, there is a source for our faith which is the BIBLE. So when we consider the fact that there is one way to heaven which is through Christ (He said it in John 14:6), the Great Commission in our today’s text takes on an urgency. It means the task Christ left for us to do – preach, teach and give the good news to the world around us, is about sharing the greatest love story ever known to humankind. The story is of how God sent his only son to pay the price for our sin so that we can have eternal life.

So rather than sitting complacently in our lifeboats while the world perishes around us, let’s consider the intent of this message from Christ. You might wonder, “What can we do as Christians? How are we supposed to really change the world?” Margaret Mead said, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has.” When Jesus chose his disciples, he didn’t put together a legion of 10,000 missionaries to go out and change the world. He started with 12 disciples. The most prominent of these followers were cowardly, crude and unsophisticated. Yet that is who he chose and the Holy Spirit did the rest.

Last week I shared with you the last line of this passage, “Low, I am with you always, even to the end of the world.”

I’ve been pointing out characteristics of Christ so that we will know him better. I shared in WEEK ONE how he is our *savior* who came to die for us and redeem us from our sin. In WEEK TWO I pointed out that his identity is both as *GOD and MAN*. He existed in the beginning as God but entered the human race as a baby and was later crucified on a cross. WEEK THREE I talked about how Jesus set the example and lived a life that *modeled* how a Christian should live. I used the beatitudes in Matthew 5 to show how he modeled what it meant to be poor in spirit, meek, a mourner, etc. in order to show us how to live. LAST WEEK I used this passage from today to describe how he is *always with us* and always by our side no matter what we are going through.

This morning, you have seen how vital it is to be ready to **share our faith with a world** that is searching for truth. A world that is adrift in a sea of uncertainty and death.

What will be the rescue? Where can help be found? The answer is in our salvation. Like the lifeboat passengers from the Titanic, we have found safety. Because we have been rescued, we are equipped to rescue others. We understand the peril and danger because had it not been for Christ rescuing us, we too would be lost.

By the very nature of our own salvation, we have become equipped to reach others. But we are not only REACHING others and rescuing them from eternal death. There is much more to the Great Commission than salvation.

Evangelist Bailey Smith said, **“Too many people walk down the aisle of the church, and someone shakes their hand and gives them a card saying, “Fill this out and sit here.” And the misguided convert thinks that is the Great Commission and many of them are still sitting.”**

Jesus exact words are to “Make disciples. The Greek word, “MATHETEUS” means, “TO MAKE DISCIPLES.” This case is a transitive meaning. It is an action. It is movement in process. A work in progress. Becoming a disciple is not something we can say, “last year I wasn’t a disciple but now I am.” The idea of discipleship is conforming to the image of Christ. If we are honest, we know that this is something that will always be a work in progress. So being a disciple is living out the process of becoming like Christ. It was common in Jesus days for teachers to have disciples. John the Baptist had disciples, but Jesus had a unique form of making disciples. He broke through a variety of barriers – gender, ethnic, religious, social, economic and so on. He opened a door for you and me to become a disciple.

There is an ongoing change happening in you and me. Paul said, **“...He who began a good work in you will continue it until the day of Jesus Christ.”** (Phil. 1:6) The great commission is about evangelism, but more importantly it is about making disciples of those who come to Jesus Christ. As disciples, we then invite others to become disciples. For some it means going to the farthest reaches of the earth to be the carrier of the Good News. To others it will involve being a disciple of Jesus at your place of work.

Jesus then emphasizes **“Baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”** We are baptized to demonstrate to the world that 1.) We are willing to follow Jesus and do what he did – he was baptized. 2.) We are demonstrating the symbolic cleansing of what Christ did in our life. By forgiving us of our sin and setting us free, we are cleansed of our sin. Baptism doesn’t clean us up – Jesus does that. But Baptism symbolizes physically what Jesus did spiritually. So we see the final command Jesus makes to his disciples. **“Go and make disciples of all nations”**. Over the past several weeks as we have looked at characteristics of Jesus, there are two that directly pertain to action on our part: The first and the last. The first is that *we invite Christ to come into our life and take away our sin*. Our salvation is in his hands and he gives it to us as a free gift. The final characteristic also pertains to us and that is *“Go and make*

*disciples.*” Because Jesus made a difference in our life, he will make a change in the lives of others through us.

We are the ambassadors, the messengers, the rescuers in the lifeboat looking out at the turbulent seas at people in trouble. Let’s go and make disciples.