

November 16, 2008
 Colossians 3:1-17 / Luke 9:1-6
 Luke (#42) – Jesus Goal – To Multiply Himself

For my birthday, my daughter Elisabeth gave me a book entitled: "Unchristian." It's the examination of responses to a Gallup Poll which tried to find out how non-Christians in general view Christians or the church. (And I do highly recommend it if you want to know how non-Christians view us, our faith and the church.)

But just to give you a little idea of what their study revealed, here are a few of their findings. Rather than being known as "people of grace," who reach out to sinners in love, like Jesus did, the study found that one of the primary things we're known for is being "anti-homosexual."

91% said they thought of Christians as anti-homosexual.
 87% said we were judgmental.
 85% said we were hypocritical.
 78% said we were old-fashioned.
 75% said we were too involved with politics.
 72% said we were out of touch with reality.
 70% said we were insensitive to others.
 68% said we were boring,
 64% said we were not accepting of people from other faiths,
 and 61% said we were confusing.

And as a result of these perceptions of us, 85% of non-Christians strongly believe "Christianity is not genuine and real."

Those are pretty sobering statistics, and not very flattering for us as Christian people.

Yet despite what they may infer, there is a reason for optimism. Because the same study confirms what we've known for generations — that although non-believers view US that way, they do not view JESUS that way!

"What our emerging culture thinks of Christians and the church, are pretty embarrassing and sadly true," says Dan Kimball, "But the good news is that while people have negative perceptions of the church and Christians, they are open to and respect what they know of Jesus..." In other words, people like Jesus even if they don't tend to like His followers.

Which tells us two things in relation to our Christian witness (which is what this passage is about):
 1st) We must always make sure it is Jesus — who He was, what He did and what He was like — that is the main focus of all share with them. As Jim White puts it, due to the poor perception people have of Christians nowadays, ***“We must stop presenting ourselves as the message and begin presenting Jesus as the message.”***

He’s right. Too often Christian evangelism has consisted of what we believe as opposed to that group, or what our church teaches as opposed to other churches, or the morals we hold to as opposed to the world.

But scripturally speaking that’s not evangelism. Because ultimately, the purpose of all evangelism is not to contrast us vs. them (whoever “them” may be), but to introduce people to Jesus, and who He is, and what He was like, and what He did, and what He stood for.

It’s to focus their attention on HIM, and help them get to know HIM, and wrestle with who He claims to be, so that through their contemplation of HIM, they will come to the point where they grow to admire HIM, and be enamored with HIM, and entrust their lives to HIM, and become one of those who follows HIM, because salvation comes through faith in HIM! It has nothing to do with us! Jesus is the message of the Gospel and not us!!

Yet all too often, both past and present, evangelism has been done in such a way as to suggest that people should become like us, or become one of us — which in light of what 85-90% non-believers today think of US, makes such a course of action very unwise!

2^{ndly}) The thing we can learn from the fact that so many non-believers are “open to” and “respect what they know about Jesus,” is that one of our goals in life, must be to close the obvious gap between what Jesus did and what He was like, as opposed to what His followers do and what they are like.

Or to put it in more explicit terms, we must be more purposeful and more intentional in pursuing what Thomas A’Kempis, in his classic work of devotion, called: “The Imitation of Christ” and close the gap between what people see in JESUS, and what they see in US!

And for those who think it’s contradictory to say we must not be the message, and yet we must be closer examples of Jesus, let me simply say this: Our message must always be Jesus and noting but Jesus, yet as we share about Him and point people’s attention exclusively to Him, we must be

sure to “walk as Jesus walked,” lest what we say about Him and what they see in us be so different that the dissonance between the two makes them unable to hear what we have to say. Ever tried to listen to someone when there’s feedback in the speakers? That’s what happens in relation to the Gospel when our hearts and lives and attitudes and words or lifestyle are too contrary to the One we share about. We can talk about Jesus all we like, but they won’t be able to hear us if the disharmony in the speaker is too great.

And hear me well: I’m not saying we must be perfect. If that were the case none of us would qualify, and all preachers would have to vacate the pulpit!

Yet we must never forget that one of our primary life goals, as Christian people, is to seek to become, in a very intentional way, MORE LIKE CHRIST, and thereby close the gap between what HE was like and what WE are like.

The Apostle Paul makes this clear in Philippians 2 when speaking of Christ’s humility he tells us: ***“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus...”*** That is, you must seek to imitate Christ in His humility.

And again, in regard to the way Jesus did not seek his own good but the good of many, Paul says in I Cor. 11:1, ***“Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ.”*** In other words, Paul is saying that in his desire and his attempts not to purposely try and offend anyone, he was imitating Christ. Therefore he can say, follow my example since I’m simply imitating the example of Jesus.

That’s one of the primary objectives of the Christian life. In fact, it’s the explicitly stated goal of our “election by God!” Which is why Paul could write in Romans 8:29: ***“For those God foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image (or the likeness) of His Son...”***

We need to be reminded of that frequently. God didn’t simply chose us or predestine us to be saved (if by “saved” you simply mean going to heaven when we die). He predestined us to be saved with a very specific purpose, or outcome, or intermediate goal in mind — the goal of conforming us to the image of His Son or making us more like Jesus or more Christlike as each day passes — a goal which will not be complete until He appears and we are made like Him (I John 3:2).

In fact, it's so instrumental to God's eternal purposes for us that the Apostle John can say its one of the ways we can be sure we are "in Christ." *"This is how we know we are in Him,"* says John, *"Whoever claims to live in Him must walk (or live) as He did."*

Which means that seeking to imitate Him must become a greater part of our everyday devotion to Christ.

We must be more like Him in the way He loved. / More like Him in the way He cared. / More like Him in His humility, and the way He "went around doing good." / More like Him in the way He showed compassion, and reached out to befriend the worst of sinners. / More like Him in the way He tried NOT to needlessly offend others, or be judgmental, or hypocritical, or too involved with politics. / More like Him in being sensitive to others, true to His word, meek, merciful, non-materialistic and determined at all costs to please, and do the will, of His Father in heaven.

If people like, respect and are open to Jesus, but they do NOT like, respect, or are closed to His followers, it's most likely because there is simply too much disagreement between what they see in Him and what they see in us.

Which brings me back to our text in Luke and our **FIRST** point. The disciples being sent out to do evangelistic ministry. Till this point in Jesus ministry, Jesus has been doing all the ministry. He has been doing all the healing, and all the miracles, and all the casting out of demons, and both cases of raising of the dead. But now, for the very first time, all that begins to change. And because it does, we begin to see that what He's been doing all along is teaching (both verbally and by example), and preparing, and equipping His disciples for the day when He would send them out to do the things He'd been doing.

But before He does, He does something that's a bit unfamiliar to us. He calls them to Himself and *"gives them power and authority to cast out demons, cure diseases, preach the kingdom and heal the sick"* (vv. 1 and 6).

Why does He do it? Because He knew that the task He was giving them to do could not be done simply using mere human willpower, ingenuity, wisdom, or strength. In fact, it cannot be done simply using faith and prayer, for if it could have been done that way, Jesus would simply have sent them out and told them to believe and bathe everything they did in prayer.

But He doesn't. Because the things He commissions them to do demands that they first receive the bestowal of a power and authority that come from above.

Remember what our passage from Daniel said last week? Speaking of Jesus, or the Son of Man, Daniel said:

"In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days, and was led into His presence. He was given authority, glory, and sovereign power, and all peoples, nations and men of every language worshipped Him. His dominion (or rule) would be an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and His kingdom is one that will never be destroyed."

So we have Jesus coming before God the Father (the Ancient of Days) and being given by Him His own divine *"authority, glory and sovereign power."* And what we see in this morning's passage is Jesus taking of the power and authority given to Him by His Father and bestowing it upon His disciples — a power and authority to "cast out demons, cure diseases, preach the kingdom and heal the sick."

What was this experience like? We don't know for sure, because it happened before the Holy Spirit had not yet been poured out. Yet surely there had to be a sense in which they sensed themselves being infused with a divine power and sovereign authority similar to what many have sensed when the Holy Spirit has come into them with power and authority.

D. L. Moody, for instance, speaks of an occasion in His life when he was walking (of all places!) down Wall Street in New York City, and was so overcome by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, that he fell to the ground and could not move for quite some time. "I seldom refer to it," Moody would later say. "It is almost too sacred to (talk about)... I can only say God revealed Himself to me, and I had such an experience of His love, that I had to ask Him to stay His hand."

A. T. Pierson, a Presbyterian minister, and one of the greatest preachers, writers and missionary leaders of the late 1800's had an experience of God's power on November 12, 1875, and within 16 months of that experience, saw more people converted to Christ through his ministry than he had in the previous 16 years!

Graham Pulkingham explains his experience this way as he was being prayed for: "All awareness of the men and their prayers; of the room, and even of myself, was obliterated by the immense presence of God's power. He was unmistakably there, and my inner response was like the clatter of a bamboo wind chime in a gale; the very foundations of my soul shook violently."

And I could go on and on: Blaise Pascal, Jonathan Edwards, John Wesley, Thomas Aquinas, Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, A. J. Gordon... and so many more.

They all speak of an experience where they sensed the manifest power and presence of God poured out upon them.

And though we can't know for sure what the disciples experienced, we can be pretty sure it was probably similar to some of the experiences I just described for you. Because it wasn't simply a commissioning service, it was an anointing service, where Jesus actually bestowed upon them divine power and sovereign authority over evil spirits, disease and sickness.

Roger Ellsworth is right:

"The Church, in order to maintain her credibility in the world, must have the power of God. She is involved in a great spiritual warfare, and only God's power will enable her to prevail. Human ingenuity and wisdom are simply not equal to the task. Trying to do this kind of work without the power of God is like trying to break huge granite boulders with our bare hands."

Then **SECONDLY**, Jesus not only gives them power and authority, he also calls them to adopt a simple or missionary lifestyle. Better yet, a lifestyle that forced them to rely upon God for everything! A lifestyle that increases the faith in those who adopt it, and also has a positive evangelistic effect upon the non-believers who observe it.

I remember my first encounter with people who actually took this command seriously and put it into practice. I was on a train heading out of Salzburg, Austria, in 1979, in the last few weeks of my 3 ½ months backpacking Europe, when I heard some girls in the second class section of the train speaking ENGLISH! And being homesick by that time, I gravitated to the sound of English like iron to a magnet!

And as we talked, I discovered that they were with an organization called: "Operation Mobilization." They were heading back to the city of Brussels, Belgium which they had left two months earlier with only enough money to keep them going for two weeks! The rest of the time they traveled around simply praying for what they needed, or living by faith.

And it was so neat to hear all their stories of God miraculously supplying their needs. How He provided food / housing / the offer of rides / and unexpected cash gifts for transportation and other basic needs. It was one of the things God used in my life to show me He was real, and speak to me of faith and the power of prayer. It's hard to argue with people who step out and take God at His word, and put their faith in Him and cast themselves entirely on His grace to provide what they need.

Yet the opposite is also true. Had they been driving around in a luxurious Mercedes, staying in five star hotels, with slews of credit cards, and huge wads of cash in their wallet, they wouldn't have made any impression on me at all! In fact, they would have turned me off to the Christian faith altogether!

That's why I believe Darrel Bock is right when he says of this passage: *"As a contrast to the cultural peddlers of religion and philosophy of their (day), the disciples are to carry the gospel so as to signal the (motives) of those who serve the gospel. Modesty is the rule, ministry is the focus. I wonder how often the Gospel's credentials have been damaged in more recent times because this modest approach to mission was not followed."*

Which brings me to my LAST point—Jesus and the multiplication of Himself. Because that's what we see in this entire passage: The disciples going out in Jesus power, with Jesus authority, living the same modest lifestyle Jesus lived, and doing the exact same things He did—"preaching the gospel, casting out demons and healing people everywhere."

What were they doing? Replicating Jesus in every way! Doing the exact same things Jesus did, in the exact same way Jesus did them, with the exact same power Jesus did them with! That was Jesus purpose — to multiply Himself. More people reached with the Gospel, and more people healed, and more delivered from evil spirits, because now there were 12 doing it instead of just one.

Yet, this passage teaches us even more than that. It teaches us the best way to evangelize—which brings me back to the book I mentioned at the beginning, that Elisabeth gave me for my birthday.

Most people think that all Christians are interested in is converting them. Simply sharing the Gospel and then pressuring them to "make a decision for Jesus."

Another way of putting it is that Christians in America are thought of as only being concerned about "where the person's spirit will spend eternity." Which means that somewhere along the line, in a very unbiblical shift of emphasis, the priorities of Jesus who taught His disciples to reach out by preaching, and doing good, and healing people everywhere, were somehow displaced by priorities that essentially taught: "Our only task is to save souls." "The only thing that matters to God is a person's soul."

And its not just today's church that is guilty of doing it. *"back in the 1800's, General William Booth (who started the Salvation Army) was once criticized for offering food and meals to*

people instead of the simple Gospel,” says Barclay. “The old warrior flashed back, “It is impossible to comfort men’s hearts with the love of God when their feet are perishing with cold.”

Jesus would have agreed. That’s why, when He sent His disciples out, He didn’t simply send them out to preach, or share the Gospel message, as is common today. Not at all. He sent them out to help people and serve people and do people good by healing their illnesses and delivering them from demonic oppression.

It’s the very thing He Himself did, which is why, when Peter looks back and summarizes Jesus life, he can say in Acts 10:38: “He went doing good, and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with Him.”

It’s kind of sad, then, is it not, that when people today are asked to give a general summary of what Christians are like, they don’t describe us in terms similar to what Peter said of Jesus or what Luke said of the disciples. They don’t say: “Oh yes, Christians are the ones who are always going about doing good and bringing healing people.” “Christians, yes I know them, they’re the ones who go about living a modest lifestyle, serving the poor and taking care of the widows and orphans. No one does it like them.”

Margret Feinberg puts it this way: *“I would hope people would look at us and say: “Those Christians are the ones who run in when everyone else is running out. Those Christians are the ones who didn’t give up on the crumbling inner cities... Those Christians are the ones who put an end to human (sex) trafficking. Those Christians are the ones who helped win the war on AIDS around the world... Those Christians are the one’s who helped my mother when she got Alzheimer’s. Those Christians are the ones who were kind to me when I was new to the area. Those Christians are the ones that made me want to believe in God.”*

It’s too bad people don’t see us that way. Because you know what? If George Gallup had taken a poll shortly after this sending out of the 12, you know what the results would most likely have been?

QUESTION: “Describe in your own words what you think the essence of Christianity is.”

ANSWER: “Well, I’m not sure of all the ins and outs, but this much I know, all they do is go about preaching good news of God’s power and reign, and healing sick people, and curing those with diseases, and liberating all who were under the oppressive torment of demonic

influences. They don't ask for money or have many possessions, but this much I know — they sure love people and have hearts that want to serve others.”

So, let me close with a story I found extremely interesting. Most of you heard about the Christian singer, Steven Curtis Chapman, and the tragic loss of His adopted daughter back in May, when his son mistakenly backed up the car in the driveway and hit her.

A few weeks afterward he was asked to write a special article to CNN about adoption. He spoke of how God's heart is for the orphan, and how he started an adoption agency called "Shaohannah's Hope," which "mobilizes people, families and communities to be loving examples of God's love for them."

Chapman wrote:

"If only 7 percent of the 2 billion Christians in the world would care for a single orphan in distress, there would effectively be no more orphans. If everybody would be willing to simply do something to care for one of these precious treasures, I think we would be amazed by just how much we could change the world."

And the part that caught my attention the most was what one person (obviously a non-believer), who read the article wrote in response. Listen to what He says, because I believe it summarizes this passage so well:

"This may be the most compelling argument I've heard for Christianity in my lifetime. When it says that the governments are not responsible for these children, but religion should be, I am thinking that finally a voice of reason comes from a religion of chaos. When the church, whatever church, goes back to the true roots of taking care of social issues, not political ones, I may begin to reshape my opinion of organized religion. However, as long as Right Wing Christian Conservatives use more of their power, position and money to fight against issues like gay marriage or to influence elections, instead of caring for the poor, hungry, destitute, homeless, and forgotten, then religion is doomed. It has failed in its one true fundamental objective — to care for those that Jesus taught about in the New Testament. Come on Christians, listen to a man who at least has his head on straight."

Or we could say: *"Come on Christians, listen to what Jesus tells His followers to do."*

Because if we did, we may see a complete change in the way people view us, and their openness to embracing our faith.