

Reaching the World

Your Life Mission:

Revelation 5:9-10

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With a million people fishing this weekend in Minnesota, what should you talk about? I thought about all those boats. I thought about the most famous boat in the Bible. Noah's ark! Should I talk about Noah's ark? It didn't exactly fit today. Although, something said on the ark may fit. These are interesting statements overheard on the ark:

- "I finally get a bass boat and now I have to take the whole family..."
- "Hey, there are more than two flies in here!"
- "And whatever you do, DO NOT pull this plug out."
- "Don't make me pull this Ark over and come back there!"
- "OK, who's the wise-guy who brought the mosquitoes on board?"
- "Are we there yet?"

"Are we there yet?" may express the sentiments of some confirmation students here. I bet some of them are ready to be finished. Today, I want to challenge you to see more than this short journey called confirmation studies. I want you to consider God's picture for your life.

There's a *Peanuts* cartoon where Linus shoots arrows and then paints the targets after they stick. He says, "This way I get bull's-eyes every time." Linus captures something about you and me. We tend to justify what we do and rationalize what we are. We think, "If I try to be good and do mostly what I think is good, I'll be doing God's will." We reason that whatever results must be God's will. Entire churches do their religious thing and then assume that the outcome must be God's target. We are no better than Linus painting the target after he shoots.

Recently I received a letter from a confirmation class of a sister congregation. They had been learning about how the Apostle Paul's letters encouraged and instructed the church, and they decided to try the same thing with us. They wrote:

We would like to share our thoughts about how to be a good Christian by the following list of ideas:

- Serving Jesus by serving others
- Prayer
- Know that God is always with you
- Participating in church activities
- Follow (to some degree) the teachings of the bible
- Share your faith with others
- Listen to and accept other people's faith

We feel these traits represent a good Christian, and we hope that all Christians would follow these to some degree to live a good life.

It is terrific to hear from young people as they seek to grasp God's word. We would do well to follow most of their advice. However, one statement stood out because it wasn't what I expected. I was struck by the words "Follow (to some degree) the teachings of the bible." "To some degree" sounds like fudging to me. Now, these are the words of young students and believers that we want to affirm; and I can affirm their efforts and honesty. In that honesty they've opened our eyes. Don't the words "to some degree" suggest less than a full trust and whole-hearted commitment to the teachings of the Bible? And doesn't that posture reflect more on us adults than on them? How we treat the Scriptures is picked up by our young people. Jesus was not concerned that people followed the Scriptures too closely or too literally; he was upset that they followed the Bible too little. He said:

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

(Matthew 5:17-19, NIV)

People express themselves with words, so how you treat their words is how you treat them. When you treat their words lightly, dismiss their words quickly or interpret their words freely, you show them disrespect. Do that with a spouse, and there will be pain. Disagreements with people must be conducted carefully; or you may, without realizing it, reject them. How do you treat God's word? Jesus told his disciples:

Those who obey my commandments are the ones who love me. And because they love me, my Father will love them, and I will love them. And I will reveal myself to each one of them. (John 14:21, NLT)

He told some religious leaders:

You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God.
(Matthew 22:29, NIV)

I believe that is true of us. We get messed up in our thinking and actions because we are ignorant of what God said and what God can do. God has a dream, a mission for your life. God doesn't steer you like an animal on a leash so you automatically fulfill it. Instead, he talks to you as his child. He paints a picture for you to see. In the Scriptures he reveals his dream. God offers us a big picture, a target, which he has already painted, and that he intends to hit. When you know what he is aiming at, you can better see what your mission is.

The Apostle John was caught up to heaven in a vision. He saw and heard many things, and he wrote down these for us believers. At the throne of God, John saw Jesus standing as the Lamb who bore our sins. Four interesting creatures and twenty-four leaders holding in golden bowls our prayers, and the prayers of millions before us and after us, fell down before Jesus and sang to him:

Your blood has ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. And you have caused them to become God's Kingdom and his priests. And they will reign on the earth. (Revelation 5:9-10, NLT)

This song is not only about Jesus. It is about your mission.

The song first speaks about Jesus' blood ransoming people. In other words, Jesus purchased freedom for people. All of us sin. Through that debt and deceit we become slaves to a deadly master. The focus of Jesus and his disciples was not indoctrinating people, but freeing them. Wherever you see destruction, within the soul, within the family, within the community and with nations, you are witnessing the effect of our bondage to sin. As Jesus' disciple, you are to help people experience the freedom Jesus won. People are not freed by the ephemeral feeling of love itself. The work of that love when Jesus canceled their debt on the cross is what frees them. Therefore, people need to hear more than the command to love and wishes of love. They need to hear how through Jesus you've experienced the release of forgiveness and changes in your life. Have you experienced forgiveness and power to change? Then know that what's happening with you can happen through you to others. But who are the others?

The song speaks about people from every tribe, language, people and nation. God not only wants to work through you to touch your schoolmates, family members, neighbors and work associates. He sees you working and living so that every cluster of humanity on this globe has someone experiencing the freedom Jesus purchased and sharing that freedom. He loves the people of North Korea and Yemen. They are his. He loves the people of Iraq and Saudi Arabia. They are his. He cares for his children in Israel and Uganda. He's passionate about the people of Vietnam and Malaysia. They are his. Because they are his and you are his, you have a global call. You have a global mission. Your school work, your work experience, your family relationships are all part of God's unique work in your life so that people of every type and stripe may find freedom through Christ's blood. You and I can not sit back and do God's will. God calls all of us to go in some way. We may go in prayer, in giving or in writing if not physically. However, we all must go! When you turn to the Lord in faith, every experience becomes

preparation for your life mission. The bully on the playground, who harassed you, the pain in the dentist chair, the F on the English exam, the rejection of a friend, the time practicing a trumpet, all prepare you to serve in unique ways.

God takes all of that and makes something special of you. The heavenly song says that he makes us become God's kingdom and priests who rule. That means as you trust Jesus, God's rule of earth advances through your obedience and people come home to their heavenly Father through your witness.

Middle school and junior high years can be tough. If there is anything different or unique about you, some kids can be merciless. That is how many treated Billy at junior high camp. Billy was spastic. He walked awkward and talked awkward, and kids continually mimicked and ridiculed him. As a joke his cabin chose him to give the devotions before the entire camp. They knew he couldn't do it. They just wanted to see him struggle. Billy stood before hundreds of junior high kids. Many jeered and sneered. In a struggle of interminable length, he spit out these words only, "Jesus loves me and I love Jesus." When he finished, the kids were shaking. They weren't overtaken by laughter. They were overcome with grief and shame. The Spirit of God broke their little-but-hard hearts. Through Billy's witness they returned home to their heavenly Father. Fifty of those junior high kids became pastors and missionaries all over the world. Billy, crippled as he was, was a priest for his heavenly Father. That is your life mission.

When you put your faith in Jesus, he makes you a priest just like him. He puts you on the road so that everywhere you go, you make a difference as you obey him. Jesus looked to his heavenly Father and obeyed him at every turn. He now calls you to look to him, for he's got a big dream that you are part of. He loves the entire world, every tribe, language, people and nation. Will you love them too? It's your choice.