

“It All Starts with Commitment” - Part 1

Romans 10:1-12

January 17, 2010

We have the ability to change the world for the better. A lot of people don't believe that because they think that they are too small and too insignificant to truly affect anything. Even as a church, looking at the world around us, it is easy to be overwhelmed. But I believe that we can make a difference, not necessarily because of who we are, but because of whose we are. A couple of weeks ago I talked about how everything begins with the grace of God, and how that grace anoints humanity. When we accept that anointing, when we begin to enter into a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, we begin to tap into a power that is far beyond anything that we can comprehend. But how do we access that power? How do we enter into that committed relationship with the Lord.

Over the past year and a half, in various ways, I've talked about God's five purposes for the church and for our lives - worship, fellowship, service, discipleship, and evangelism. This is not my revelation. It comes from Rick Warren of Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California, and he found it in Acts 4:42-47, *“They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”*

That is our view of the early church, of how those five purposes were lived out in the life of the church. And I believe that God still expects those five purposes to be lived out in this and every congregation; to be brought to life in the midst of our life. If we miss any of these five, we miss one of the reasons why we're here. God has these purposes for our lives, but he doesn't force them on us. He gives us a choice. And that's where commitment comes in. He has five purposes, but we must commit to those five purposes. When we do that, we become what God wants us to be. Without them we are limited. With them, in them, God can make miraculous things happen. What are those commitments? There are five of them but today we will look at the first two. What are the commitments that will help us change our lives, and in turn, change the world around us?

1. I MUST COMMIT MY LIFE TO CHRIST.

That's basic. Before anything else can happen, we've got to get to know God. We were put on this earth to know God, to walk with God. He gave us the opportunity and the ability to know him, to know his power, his grace, his love. And we know God by making the commitment to follow Jesus into the mission field that our world has become. It is the most important issue before us.

There are other important issues that we deal with. Like the career issue: “What am I going to do for the rest of my life? How will I make a living?” That question is so important that we begin to ask children in elementary school. “What are you going to do when you grow up?” Some people don't know the answer until they get into their 50's, but still we ask because we know it is important. And then there is the question of marriage: “With whom am I going to spend my life? Am I going to get married or am I going to stay single? And if I marry, who will I marry?” Again, children begin thinking about that at a very early age. We play

house. Girls dream of what their wedding will be. And then there are dating services available through radio and Internet ads. We focus on finding that person with whom we want to share our life. Some decide to stay single because they cannot find the right person. Some choose someone whether they are right or not because the question carries such power, “With whom am I going to spend my life?”

Now these 2 important issues can really mess up our life if we choose without wisdom. They can bring us a lot of pain, but that pain is only temporal, not eternal. It is real pain, but it’s only for a season, a limited time on earth. But if we miss the most important question, “Who am I going to live for?” that has eternal implications. Heaven and hell are literally in the balance. This is the question of purpose. We are going to live for someone. Some live for themselves. Some live for the approval of the world around them. Some live for the things they can acquire. The purposes may differ, but we all live for some purpose, some thing or some one. And if we are wise, we will live for the Lord who made us for a purpose; who came to redeem us that we might live.

We start making a difference in the world by committing our life to Jesus Christ. But what does it mean to commit my life to Jesus? Romans 10:9 *“If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”* Jesus made it so simple, simple enough for everyone to understand. So simple that sometimes we have trouble grasping it, so amazed we are with the all encompassing love of God. Paul wrote that if we want to truly live, first we must believe that Jesus was raised from the dead by the very hand of God. That’s what Easter is all about. That is the foundation of our hope and our faith. And once we believe, we need to confess, to admit that we believe and that Jesus is the Lord of our life. “Lord” is an Old English word for “the guy in charge, the CEO, the boss.” God wants to be in charge of our life, the director of your life. He wants to be the manager of our life because he has a plan for us.

Now every commitment carries with it a certain cost. A price tag is attached. There are advantages, and there is always a cost. So we have to look at each commitment and ask, “Is the benefit worth the cost?” What is the cost of making a commitment to Jesus? It is giving up control over your life so that Jesus can be in charge. And that’s tough because we like to pretend that God is in charge when in truth we never want to give up control. And so we pray, “Lord, Thy will be done, but this is what I want and expect your will to be.” We have perfected the line, “God’s Word says I should ..., but I say ...” We maintain control. But when we truly, wholly and completely make the commitment to Jesus, then we must deny ourselves, be willing to sacrifice ourselves that God’s will may be done in our life.

That is tough, but it comes with many benefits. First, our sins are forgiven and forgotten, as though they never happened. Second, by connecting to God we tap into God’s power. Third, we begin to fulfill God’s purpose for our life which helps bring joy. And fourth, our future with God in heaven is secured and assured. All in all, it’s pretty good deal, well worth the cost. But first, we’ve got to settle this issue. If we want to make a difference in the world, we must make Jesus the Lord of our life; we must commit our life to Jesus Christ. But that’s just the foundation. Once we’ve committed our life to Christ, there is so much more that God has in store for us. There are four more commitments to make. And the next is this,

2. I MUST COMMIT TO BE A MEMBER OF GOD’S FAMILY.

1 Peter 1:3 *“God has given us the privilege of being born again so that we are now members of God’s own*

family.” In the beginning, God said that is not good for this human one to be alone. God created other humans so that we might help and support one another. God never meant for us to have to handle all of our problems by ourselves, on our own. He wants us, he expects us to support, encouragement, and help one another. So the family of God, the Church, was created.

Scripture tells us that it’s a privilege to be a part of the church. In the United States we often take that for granted. We can freely come and go. That’s not the case elsewhere. In many countries it’s against the law to worship Jesus. Meeting with other Christians is punishable by death. And yet believers in those places fully know what a privilege it is to be a part of God’s family. And we know the advantage that a family name can bring. Paris Hilton gets all sorts of attention, but certainly not for anything positive or important that she has done. It is the family name. Chelsea Clinton still gets a fair amount of press. Why does anyone care about her? It’s all because of her family name. As American Express use to say, “Membership has its privileges.” Likewise, there are privileges when we become part of the family of Jesus Christ; the family of God.

Many in our world don’t think that’s important, but we need the family of God in our life. It’s a privilege to be a part. Just like a child without a family is an orphan, a Christian without a church family is a spiritual orphan. For the Christian life involves more than just believing. It involves belonging. Many times someone will ask, “Can’t I be a good Christian without attending church, without being a part of the church?” And I say emphatically, “No!” These people expect me to be nice and support their opinion. But I’m not and I don’t, because being active and involved in the church is an expectation for Christians. I mean, if anyone could be a good Christian without being active in the church, it was Jesus. But his habit was to publically worship weekly. He went to the synagogue. He went to church. And beyond that, Romans tells us that we’re not only to be committed to Christ, but we’re supposed to “*Be devoted to one another.*” (Romans 12:10.)

There are many here today who do not know how they would have or could have handled the crises of their life without the help, encouragement and compassion of their Christian friends. People often ask me how those without faith can deal with death, or some of those other tough challenges in life. And honestly, I don’t know. Nor do I know how some can come to the church in times of crisis, and then go away when the crisis has passed. And yet I see it all the time, with both short term and long term members. But we need the family of God. We need the church. For God never meant for us to go through life on our own. We are to be devoted to one another, to be committed to one another. We are to be faithful friends that others can count on in times of need. We commit our life to Jesus, and the very next step in our spiritual growth and maturity is to commit ourselves to the family of God.

That doesn’t mean that we are to simply get our names on the membership roll, because that isn’t real membership. Members are involved. Members move from being spectators to participators. They move from being a consumer to a contributor. They are not just attenders, but through their commitment and activity, they become members. That is the expectation from God’s grace, and also, the expectation of St. Paul United Methodist Church in Manchester. Some do not know their PLACE in the church and so we occasionally bring out the PLACE program, where we look at our personality, spiritual gifts, abilities, passion, and experience to try to figure out how God has shaped us, and where he wants to PLACE us. If you are interested in those assessments, talk to me. First we must commit our life to Christ, and then make the commitment to be a member of the family of Christ.

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We have 3 commitments to go. We will look at them next week. But this morning I want to leave you with a very optimistic note. Because many look at our world, many look to the future only to be filled with worry and concern. Many believe that there is no hope. But I know better. We can change the world. We can make a difference in the world. We have the power. We have the tools. We have the talent. And we have the Lord Jesus Christ. But it all starts with commitment. We commit our lives to Jesus Christ. And we become committed members of God's Church. And those commitments will bring forth a new hope; a new beginning; a new world. And in your life may it be so. Amen.