

## “It All Starts with Commitment” - Part 2

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

January 24, 2010

We can make a difference in the world, and it all begins with commitment. And that's not hard to see, for in today's world, a fully committed few have changed the face of the Middle East, even the face of the world. The threats of terror have altered the way in which the whole world thinks and acts. We are not called to be terrorists, but if we are committed to the cause of God, we, too can change the world. It has happened before. After the Resurrection, after the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, 120 disciples turned the world upside-down. And we can do that too, if we are fully committed to God.

Just as there are five purposes for the church - worship, fellowship, service, discipleship and evangelism - there are five commitments we must make if we are going to change the world for God. If we make these commitments, God can do miraculous things in the midst of our lives. But if we do not, we limit our ability and God's ability to make things happen in us and through us. Last week we talked about the first two: 1. I commit my life to Christ, and 2. I become a committed member of God's family, the Church. And then,

### 3. I COMMIT TO BE A MODEL OF THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST.

As Christians, we are representatives of God. People form opinions about Jesus based on what they see in us. St. Francis of Assisi said, *“Preach the gospel at all times, and if necessary, use words.”* Our life is a commentary on the One we claim to follow. Did you know that the term “Christian” was a derogatory term, a slur against believers? “You're one of those Christ-ians.” The word literally means “little Christ”. They'd say, “That person is just like that Jesus guy. She's a ‘little christ’. He's a ‘christ-ian.’” “Has anybody ever accused you of being like Jesus? And if not, why not? As we grow, God wants us to learn to act the way Jesus acted. Think the way he thought. Feel the way he felt. God wants us to learn to make decisions the way Jesus did; to treat people the way Jesus did. My belief and behavior, my attitudes and actions have to come under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. We need to model the life of Jesus.

This is a goal of spiritual maturity. God wants us to grow up to be like Jesus in every area of our life. How does that happen? Is there a Jesus pill I can take to transform me into a Super Saint? No. There's no single tape, no book, no conference that we can go to that will make us spiritually mature. There is no mountaintop experience that can make us instantly mature. Growing to spiritual maturity is a long, hard process. It will take the rest of our life. But the secret of becoming like Christ is to get into the Bible, for the Bible has the mind of Christ; the attitudes and actions of Jesus. The more we get God's Word into our hearts and minds, the more we're going to be like Jesus. You don't like to read? OK. Pick up the Bible on CD or tape. Play it on your way to work, or on the drive home. Listen to it when you run or exercise. But get into the Bible.

It will not happen by accident. In college I was a big believer in osmosis. I would sleep with a book under my pillow in hope that the information would magically be transported into my brain. It never worked, but I continued to try it rather than study. Today many Christians seem to believe in osmosis as well because they keep the Bible on a bookshelf rather than before their eyes or ears. They keep God's Word on the fringes of their life instead of pouring it and praying it into their hearts. Osmosis will not work. So how do we make the Bible, God's Word, a part of us? We've got to read it; to hear it; to study it; to pray over it. We've got to be committed to it. And we commit to God's Word so we can know Jesus; so we can learn to imitate and model the life of Christ. We need to dedicate ourselves to learning the Bible, so we can know God; so we know God's Word; so we can know Jesus Christ. Hebrews 6:1 *“Let us go on and become mature in our understanding as strong Christians ought to be.”* And Proverbs 23:12 *“Commit yourself to instruction, attune your ears to hear words of knowledge.”* We have to get into the Bible, and we have to find ways to allow the Bible to get into us.

Now there might be some men here, or maybe at home who don't want to be like Jesus. I am not going to be too upset about that because they're probably concerned about being like the image of Jesus that they've been shown since they were a child. There is a gentle, meek and mild Jesus. We have stressed his sensitivity, his inclusivity, and his tender compassion. John Eldredge has called this Jesus “Mr. Rogers with a beard.” This Jesus would never offend anyone, never judge anyone, and never send anybody to Hell. It makes one wonder

why anyone would want to crucify him. Men do not want to follow or imitate such a meek and mild man. They want a leader who is decisive, tough and fair. They want a leader who is dynamic, outspoken, and bold. They respect a man who tells it like it is and doesn't mince words, even if someone gets offended. Men respect a leader who does what he thinks is right and doesn't care what others think of him.

Now particularly for the men here, and for those who have men sitting at home, know that that picture of a leader is found in the scriptures. It is found in Jesus. He was fearsome. Mark tells us that at times the disciples were terrified of him and that people would be afraid to ask him questions. He was abrasive. He had no qualms about offending people, and He regularly ridiculed His disciples for their thick-headedness. He was ill mannered. He walked into a dinner party and started insulting His host. Jesus in the scripture is often more General Patton than Mister Rogers. David Murrow writes, “Jesus is the most courageous, masculine man ever to walk the earth.” Male or female, we need to make the commitment to be like Him; to make the commitment to be a model of His life.

Answers to the great questions in life will not be found on television or in the newspapers. They're not in People magazine or the tabloids. Those answers can only be found in God's Word. >So why do we spend more time watching and reading something we don't believe rather than something we do? If I've got all kinds of problems and the answers are in the Bible, why would I look for them someplace else? That doesn't make sense. If I've got a problem, I need to get into this book. I need to find out how to think the way Jesus thought. The Bible says that one of the marks of maturity is that we know the Word. *“They must be committed to the revealed truths of the Christian faith and must live with a clear conscience.”* (1 Timothy 3:9) If I'm going to be all that God wants me to be, I commit my life to Christ. I must commit to being a member of God's family. And I make the commitment to be a model of His life.

#### 4. I COMMIT TO BE A MINISTER OF HIS GRACE.

I'm not talking about being a pastor. I'm talking about being a minister, and we are a people who believe in the ministry of all Christians, of all believers. But we need to do more than believe. We have to act as though it is true. That's important, for God put us on earth and gave us certain gifts and talents for a purpose. He expects us to use those talents and abilities to help others to make the world a better place. And whenever we use our talents and abilities to help others without thought of reward, or of how we will benefit, it is an act of ministry. Every Christian is called to be a minister. In fact, non-ministering Christian is an oxymoron, like jumbo shrimp or interesting sermon. God does not ask us to do everything in the world, but he does ask us to do something, to be in ministry.

Now if you want to know what God wants you to do, look at the way he has shaped you. Look at your talents, your abilities, your heart, your personality, your experiences, your opportunities, your educational background. Look at all those things. There is help in this process through a program known as PLACE. I talked about it last week, and hopefully you will continue to hear more about it. Because we have been shaped a certain way for ministry, and God has a PLACE where He wants each of us to be. God doesn't want to waste all that He has done in us and through us. He wants to use us, and all that is in us. God wants to take the things we can do well, and the things we want to do, to help others. Why would God give us talents and then not use them? That would be a waste, and God created us for a purpose, not to be a waste of His time and energy. God wants to use us in ministry, that the world might be made better through us.

1 Peter 4 *“God has given each of you some special abilities. Be sure to use them to help each other...”* Notice that it doesn't say that we have special abilities that we can hide, or retire on. We don't have them to boost our ego or become famous. God gives us abilities so we can help others. If we want to be like Jesus, we have to take his advice seriously. Matthew 20:28 *“Your attitude must be like My own, for I, the Messiah, did not come to be served, but to serve.”* God expects us to imitate Jesus. And God expects us to serve.

So what is your ministry? Somehow over the years we have looked at that verse about Jesus becoming the servant and we think that we are the ones who are to be served. Last week I said that membership in the church has its privileges, and it does. Our sins are forgiven and forgotten. We can tap into the power of God. We have a purpose to live for. And our future is secured and assured in heaven. And on earth, we have those with whom we can fellowship, with whom we can share the good and bad, the joys and concerns that life brings. We have privileges, but we also have the responsibility to serve in ministry.

Understand that the Church is the only organization that comes together for the benefit of those who are not yet a part of it. We are to be in service. We are to be committed to our personal ministry where we deny ourselves; where we give of ourselves; where we become the servant rather than the served. This is crucial because the day will come when we stand before the Lord. We will be asked what we did with our life, with our talents and abilities; with our opportunities to help and heal, and serve. Did we only take care of ourselves, or did we make the world a better place through our ministry to others?

There's one more commitment. If I'm going to be all that God wants me to be, I have to commit my life to Christ; be a committed member of His family; be a model of the life of Christ; and be a minister of His grace, serving others, and then...

#### 5. I COMMIT TO BEING A MESSENGER OF HIS LOVE.

Ultimately, love is the only thing that will change the world for the better. Decades ago Jackie DeShannon sang, “What the world needs now is love, sweet love. That's the only thing that there's just too little of.” If we are to change the world, we must, one-on-one, share the love of Jesus Christ with everyone we see.

2 Corinthians 5:19-20 *“For God was in Christ, restoring the world to Himself. This is the wonderful message He has given us to tell others. We are Christ's ambassadors. God is using us to speak to others.”* We are ambassadors. An ambassador is someone who represents another. Usually we think about an ambassador representing a country, but the Bible tells us that when we become a believer, we become an ambassador for Jesus. You are the only Bible some people will ever read. You might be the only Christian that some people ever know, that they're ever close to, that they ever talk to. We have a duty, a responsibility to be a faithful representative of Jesus; an ambassador for God.

If we are to be faithful ambassadors for Christ, we need to faithfully deliver the same message that Jesus offered, *“Behold, the kingdom of God is close at hand.”* God is looking to establish, even re-establish a relationship with you and me. He is willing to forgive and forget all the sins, all the times that we have gone against his will. He is willing and able to cleanse us from the evil with which we have connected; through which we have been infected; by which our lives have been negatively affected. Through the sacrifice and grace of Jesus, we can be made new. Our spirit can come to life and we can become the powerful people God has created us to be. There is hope. There is new life. Because the kingdom of God is close at hand. Our past is forgiven. Our present empowered. Our future secured and assured.

That is the good news, the greatest news in history. And the world is dying to hear it. The world is dying because they haven't heard it; they haven't received it in their life, their hearts, their souls. And yet the world is far more ready to receive that news than we are to share it. Most of the time Christians walk around acting like they've got the flu. “Sorry, but I'm a Christian and I don't want you to catch it.” We have accepted the pagan argument that our faith can only contaminate the world, not renew, restore, or improve it. So we back away from the opportunities we have to open our mouths, that the hearts of many might be opened and saved. For Jesus Christ is the best news in the world. And people need to know it. They need to know that their sins can be forgiven, that God loves them and has a plan for their life; that heaven is a free gift when we open our life to accept God's gift in faith based in Jesus Christ, our Lord. It's pretty simple, really. We don't have to be theologians to share it. God loves you. He has a plan for your life and Jesus is the way to heaven. Simple. You can be forgiven, not

through rituals that you have to do, but through what He has already done. Everybody needs to hear that message.

Some long for the return of Jesus. We look for signs and visions. We wonder why he is waiting so long. But there is only one sign that we need to be concerned about. In Matthew 24:14, Jesus, himself, tells us our part in bringing forth his return. *“And this good news [the gospel] shall be preached into all the world, to all people.”* Not just nations, but every dialect, every tribe, every sub-culture of every culture of every nation. Before Jesus returns we have the responsibility to get the good news of Jesus Christ in front of every person on the face of the earth. Jesus will not return until everyone has had the chance to hear, to receive, to believe in Jesus Christ, our Lord.

So if you want Jesus to come back soon, start witnessing. 2 Peter 3:15 *“Remember why He is waiting. He is giving us time to get His message of salvation out to others.”* Every time we tell somebody about Jesus, every time we share the Good News, every time someone comes to Christ, we’re not only helping change the world, we are fulfilling the prophecy of God’s Word.

These are the five commitments that we must make if we are to fulfill God’s purposes. We must commit ourselves to Christ, to the Church, to be a model of Christ, to be a minister of grace, and to be a messenger of love. They come out of the Great Commandment to love God wholly and completely, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. They come out of the Great Commission to go into all the world and make disciples, baptizing them, immersing them in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit. If we will make these five commitments, if we will commit ourselves to fulfilling the Great Commandment and the Great Commission, we can build one great Church. We can make this a Great World. We can make a difference.

God is looking for people to use; looking for those who will make a total commitment to Him. I invite you to become a world changer by making these commitments. You won’t have to do it on your own. The purpose of the church is to help you. Yet some fear that if they totally commit their life to Christ they’ll become a fanatic; or that they will lose their freedom; that they can’t have any more fun. But if we come to God wholly and completely, we will learn what freedom and joy are all about. Some are afraid that if they make these commitments they will then stumble and fail; they will fall short and be unable to keep them. So let me assure you here and now, of course you’ll fall short, as I have time and time again; as everyone has. But God is not asking us for perfection. He asks us for commitment; for a love that will not let Him go, as His love has not let us go. Some worry that they just don’t love Jesus enough to make and keep these commitments. But the problem is not that we don’t love Him enough, but that we don’t realize just how much He loves us, for if we do, we would have no problem committing our lives to Him as He has committed His life to us.

It is time for us to commit ourselves to God wholly and completely. It is time for us to fulfill God’s purposes in this church and in our lives. It is time to bring a message of hope and grace into this world, with our words and with our lives. It is time to make a difference, and it all starts with commitment. In your life may it be so. Amen.