

## Understanding the Task ahead

It's estimated that 4.5 billion people around the world don't know Christ and make no claim to follow him. In the United States some 65 million of that number don't know Christ. How many of those if you asked would say they're doing just fine without him? How many would say they have problems but nothing they can't solve? Or how many would say they just don't need Jesus. Jesus saw people around him that maybe thought they didn't need him either. Jesus was compassionate towards them, going below the surface because he knew they were hurting even if they didn't.

Of those 65 million isolated from Jesus, how many are going to hell? That's not a fair question unless we know for certain that each really doesn't believe in Jesus. Then we can answer. Anyone who doesn't believe in Jesus is going to hell. Without Jesus there's no promise of being saved. Many of those 65 million might be trying to get by on their own good works. They might be following the savior of another world religion. They might be thinking of themselves as their own savior. Some might even call themselves Christian but rely on following Christ's example, or try to redeem society by ending forms of oppression, or simply figure they'll take their chances if there is a god.

They're in danger. And they're hurting, even if they don't realize it. You and I do. Jesus did. Be friendly and find out more about them. Ask questions about their family, work, and interests. Show them love that way. They'll start to open up. Keep your ears open for hurts. Listen for relationship problems. Wait for them to share some emotional baggage they've been carrying. That's them asking for help, advice, a sympathetic ear. Then your compassion and care finds just the right moment, and you'll know, and you'll have earned the right to tell them something truly important. Jesus showed compassion for you, me, and everyone. Compassion shares Jesus to help with hurts, relationships, and baggage. We can share Jesus, and we have to because as Acts chapter four says, **"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."**

## The Great Commission

He called Peter, Andrew, James, and John to come follow him. Jesus calls us to come follow him. Now what? Not so much what we have to do, but circle again to Christ. The Bible says that Christ would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day. Those two things are completed. One major purpose of God is left to complete. For that God needs witnesses.

Witnesses only come into play after something has happened. An event creates witnesses in a sense. The idea of God needing witnesses is validated by the two major events Christ already has completed. He suffered and rose. There are witnesses to those events. The disciples were the first and they received heavy promises to strengthen them to be witnesses. And in the name of Jesus they went out and proclaimed.

Do you think as they were preparing to go out on their very first trips to proclaim Jesus, the disciples got nervous? With Jesus gone physically from the world do you think they were scared? Can you imagine them wondering if this was all really necessary? We know those feelings don't we? We know the nerves when the topic of Jesus arises in a conversation and we pause wondering if we should chime in. We know being scared thinking we have to step outside of our comfort zone. We know the feeling of if this is all really necessary. Why can't Jesus just make people believers? Why does he need witnesses?

Christ Jesus decided to work through witnesses. He poured out his love and gave power to do that work. Are you a follower of Christ? If you are that means you are next up in a long line of witnesses. Jesus doesn't have observers. We come, listen, get strengthened and encouraged by God's Word, and then we become witnesses. That's not just pastor work or church work. It's your responsibility too. Witnessing Christ doesn't necessarily mean preaching here or even using churchy talk. The commission is to share what you know. If coming to church is important, witness to why and how. If being God's friend and child has changed your life witness to that. Let your life show the people around you how Jesus loved you. That's what following Christ means. It means being clothed with power from God. It means being reassured by Jesus that as witnesses we speak for God. Jesus' words to his disciples in Luke chapter 24 are words to us too. **"The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things."**

## Who me?

If you would've looked around the room at the disciples gathered preparing themselves to go out and preach to other people about Jesus you might have noticed something. Not a famous face in the bunch. Not one from a rich powerful family. Not one professional trained speaker. Not one specially educated man. Just ordinary fishermen, tax collectors, and zealots. Ordinary people who seemed unlikely to lead a movement that to this day hasn't stopped spreading.

They were nothing but jars of clay. Ordinary, fragile, mostly unimportant. But that served a great purpose. The more ordinary, more fragile, more unimportant they looked and felt, the more they concentrated on the treasure. The more they relied on it rather than themselves. Yes they were jars of clay but they had a treasure to bring.

Do you feel like a jar of clay? We bruise, we break, we eventually die. Yes, it turns out we're nothing more than jars of clay. But instead of being a negative, that's the greatest positive. Being a jar of clay prevents you and me from pride. It gives us confidence. This doesn't depend on us. We're jars of clay! We can be confident in the treasure. That treasure is God and his glorious works. He's using ordinary people to do extraordinary things. Ministry is happening, the Word is being shared, and people are becoming familiar with Jesus through people just like you.

I think it would be okay if I named some "ordinary" people whom God is using to accomplish extraordinary things for his kingdom right in this place. Bob, who provides me with a list of names of new movers each month so I can go and visit them. Mike, who is making plans so the doors open easily so people feel welcome. Alyson, who talks about Jesus in her everyday life and impacts the people around her. Joe and Naomi, who want to make casual visits to other members to show love. Marlon and Karen, who picked up a fellow member when he needed a ride. Carla, who stayed with Ina at the hospital two weeks ago. And so many more contribute in your own ways. Lawn mowers, light changers, encouragers, singers, cooks, cleaners, givers, prayers, thinkers, dreamers, doers, counters, builders, smilers, welcomers. You might be jars of clay. But you contain a wonderful treasure, the good news that Jesus saves. Just like Paul wrote to the Corinthians in chapter 4 of his second letter, **"We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all surpassing power is from God and not from us."**

## The powerful resources we have

We were created for something greater than ourselves to rely on something greater than us. God, who is unseen but unlimited, gives resources in great supply to accomplish his plans and purposes. Nothing is impossible with him and the tool he gives to us.

God declared the whole world to be sinful. God declared the whole world saved in Christ. Those two statements are universal. They apply to all people. God made this declaration of acquittal by the good news of the gospel. It is by the gospel alone that people find out the great things God has done for them in Jesus. It is only through that message that people come to faith and stay in faith. People need to know Jesus and to know Jesus they need to know the Bible.

Ever relied on something only to have it fail you when it counted? That's what happens with things on this earth. That doesn't, it won't ever happen with God's Word. The gospel is not something that can fail. It's not something that will ever let you down. You never have to be ashamed or think you're following the wrong thing. You aren't. You're associated with the most powerful message that exists. It may seem like only words. They may be rejected by some. They may be ignored by others. But this Word of God is powerful because it comes from God. All his power is behind it to bring people to faith and have them know Jesus saved them. Every time you use this tool, God promises it will have an effect.

So when God asks you to be witness for him, when he asks you to invite others to Easter worship, when you participate in outreach, it is essential that you make use of this one powerful resource. Even if it seems like there are plenty of good messages out there, they're all temporary. Nothing will have the power of the Word of God. Nothing will have the power to rescue you from the worst disaster imaginable. Nothing can substitute for the good news that comes from God through Christ Jesus. That is found in the Bible alone. It's your tool, your gift from God that saves you and will be used by you to save others. Paul assures you in Romans chapter one that you never need to be **"ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes."**