

Finishing the Course

Acts 20:24

For the last eight weeks we have been in a series on “Living the Christian Life Today and Tomorrow.” We have looked at how you need people to live with, how you need power to live on, how you need principles to live by, and how you need to express your love for God. Today we will close out this series by making sure we finish the course.

At the end of last year we did a nine-week series on “Forty Days of Purpose” based on the “Purpose Driven Life.” The book culminates with a chapter on your life mission. Everybody’s life mission is unique. What God has called you to do, what He put you on earth to do is like no one else. And only you can fulfill your life mission. The moment you become a believer, the moment you step across the line and give your life to Jesus Christ, God has an assignment for you. That is called your life mission.

Many of the parts of your life mission are unique but there is one part of your life mission that we all have in common. That is, God wants you to tell other people about what He has done for you. The Bible says it like this in Acts 20 “The most important thing is that I complete my mission, the work that the Lord Jesus gave me to tell people the good news about God’s grace.” Once I know Christ, part of my life mission – not all of it but it’s a major part of it – is that I invite people into God’s family. My mission is to invite other people into God’s family.

Jesus said in John 20:21, “As the Father has sent Me, so am I sending you.” What has He sent us to do? The Bible tells us in Acts 1:8, “You will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, in Samaria and in every part of the world.” This is a very, very important verse to Mountain Grove, because if we are to continue to be what God has called us to be we must continue to fulfill this Scripture. If we are to continue to reach this area for Christ, then we must understand what God is saying right here.

First, it says, “You will be My witnesses.” God says that we are to be a witness. Do you know what a witness is. A witness is somebody who shares from personal experience: “I saw this...I heard that...I watched that...” Witnessing is simply sharing what God is doing in my life. Witnessing is not being a

theological expert. **Witnessing is not being a pastor or preacher. Witnessing is simply sharing what God is doing in my life.**

God says that if you are saved you are to be a witness. Some people think that is what preachers or pastors or missionaries do. **But the truth of the matter is, you are a far more effective witness than I am. You are far more effective than I will ever be.** People expect me to talk about Jesus. **When I talk about Jesus Christ people think that is my job, in their mind I am “just the paid professional.”** **On the other hand, when you talk about what God has done in your life, you are the satisfied customer.** Who has more credibility? **A paid salesman or the satisfied customer?**

People will listen to you more than they will listen to me. You are the authority on your life. **Nobody else can share your witness. If you don't do it, that is the part of the life message that God has for you that will never be heard on this earth.** And that is a tragedy. **If you don't say it, nobody else is going to say it for you.** We are to be witnessing, sharing what God has done in our lives and what has happened to us since we became believers.

Where are we to do it? It says in four places, **“In Jerusalem, in Judea, in Samaria and in every part of the world.”** What does that mean? **Am I supposed to get on a plane and go over to Jerusalem to share my faith? No.** Remember when the disciples were hearing these words from Jesus, where were they? **In Jerusalem.**

Here's the point. Start where you are. **What is your “Jerusalem”?** **Your family, your friends, and your co-workers.** That is your Jerusalem. **You start with the people closest to you. You start where you are. You don't have to go somewhere else first.** You start with the people in your own sphere of reference.

Then it says you go to “Judea.” Judea was like the county. **What is our Judea? Caldwell, Burk, Catawba, Wilkes, and surrounding counties.** Is there anybody in these counties that needs to be saved? **Absolutely, a lot.**

Then it says you are to go to “Samaria.” That would include our State and the rest of America. **But the Samaritans were culturally and ethnically different from the disciples.** **The point here, the third place you go is to people of a different culture, language, and ethnic group than you.** Do you know anybody who speaks a different language than you do? **If you live in America you do.** That is your Samaria!

Then it says go to “the ends of the world.” For hundreds and hundreds of years Christians could not fulfill this command because there was to get there. In fact, for many years people didn't even know the world was round, they thought it was flat. **But today, going to the ends of the world is a legitimate opportunity that every one in this room could eventually do.** The truth of the matter is that because of Internet you can go all around the world from your living room. **And you can share your faith.**

So what is my mission? My mission is to invite others into God's family!

What am I supposed to share? Here is your message in two words – Good News. That is what we are called to share – good news. **Mark 16:15 says,** “Proclaim the good news to everyone, everywhere.”

Do you like to get good news? Everybody does. **Do you like to share good news?** **Most people like to share it.** I have discovered that it is much more fun sharing good news than it is sharing bad news. **But do you know what else I have found?** **Most people are talking about the bad news – the war in Iraq, dirty politics, the economy, plant closings, etc.** **And you might be thinking,** “The people I work with, my friends, they are not interested in good news.” **You are dead wrong!** They are not only interested in good news; they are interested in **the Good News.**

The problem is not that your friends and co-workers are not interested. **The problem is you.** **The problem is you have forgotten how good the good news really is.** **Do you know what I have discovered?** I have discovered that once you have been a Christian for a while, you forget how miserable it was to live without hope. **You forget what it was like to worry about when you die where you were going.** **You forget what it was like to live without purpose, to have guilt and fear and regrets and bitterness and boredom in your life before Christ brought meaning and purpose and significance.** What happens is, the longer you are a Christian the more you tend to take for granted how good the good news really is.

If you were to go out in any neighborhood and ask people, “How do you get God to like you?” **About 99% of the people would say,** “You have got to work real hard to get God's approval and you have got to be really, really good. You have got to keep a lot of rules and you probably have to follow a lot of regulations and do some rituals. You have got to be a religious person. I am none of those

things so I guess I am never going to please God and I am never going to get to know God.” **Most people think it is really hard to get to know God. But the good news is, it’s not.** The good news is you get right with God; you get to know God, not through rules, regulations, rituals, or religion but through a relationship that is based just on trusting. **Just having faith.**

Notice what the Bible says in Romans 1:17, “The good news shows how God makes people right with Himself, that it begins and ends with faith. As the scripture says, Those who are right with God will live by trusting Him.” **Not by being perfect, not by never sinning, not by keeping a bunch of ceremonies and rules, but by trusting Him. That is good news.** God has made it so simple that a little child can receive Jesus Christ by simple faith. **You just trust Jesus Christ.**

When I trust my life to Jesus Christ there are three incredible, fabulous, wonderful benefits in my life. I know this is review for many of you but let’s go over it again one more time. **This is what you need to share with others. When you tell people what it means to be a believer, it does three things in your life.** For some of you here today, you are new here at Mountain Grove, you are going to get this for the very first time. Others of you have heard it and heard it but today it is going to sink in for the first time. **When you trust Jesus Christ with your life, three wonderful things happen.** He takes care of your past, your present and your future.

1. First I get forgiveness for my past. That’s the first benefit. Listen to me very carefully today, it does not matter what kind of life you have lived, it does not matter what kinds of sins you have committed, God wants to forgive you of your past and allow you to start your life over as a “new creation.” **That, my friend, is good news?** I know a lot of people walking around in depression from regret and guilt and shame in their life. Jesus says, “I want to give you a new life.”

2. He takes care of the present and He gives me a purpose for living right now. God has created you for a purpose, you are not an accident. You are not here just to take up space. **But you are never going to know God’s purpose for your life until first you get to know God.** Trying to discover why you are here, where you came from and where you are going will never make sense to you until you know God. **When you get to know God, you are going to know who you are. Why? Because God made you and God made you for a purpose.** Ever so often I meet someone who says, “I’m just trying to find myself.” **You probably aren’t going to like yourself once you find yourself!** I hear people say, “There is something missing in my life.” If you have never been saved God is missing!

You were not made to live and go through life just on your own power. **Until you have a relationship with Jesus Christ, life is not going to make sense.** That is why Jesus said in John 10:10, “I came so that you might have life and have it to the fullest.” Why did He say that? Because you are not living until you know God. **You are not living until you know the purpose He made you for and begin to fulfill it.** You are just existing. God has a mission and a purpose for your life but you are never going to know it until you get to know Christ.

3. **The third thing you get is a future.** God says, “I will give you a home in heaven.” Most people hope they are going to heaven, but they are not sure. Hope is not good enough. **Folks, this matter is too important not to know for sure.** Most people in their mind think that the way you get to heaven is by being good enough. And if you do more good in your life than you do bad in your life, maybe God will grade on a curve and say, “Ok, come on it. You get in.”

Wrong answer. It isn't going to work that way. You are never going to get into heaven on your own power because you are not good enough. **The Bible says that heaven is perfect. It is a perfect place.** There is no sorrow in heaven, no suffering in heaven, and no sin in heaven. **There is no evil and no bad in heaven. Heaven is perfect.** That means only perfect people get to go there. **If He let imperfect people into heaven, it would not be perfect any more.** And that leaves me out and it leaves you out too. There is not a snowball's chance in hell you are going to make it into heaven on your own efforts. **Forget it. Don't even try.** You are not going to get to heaven on your own efforts.

There is only one way you can get into heaven. And that is on somebody else's ticket. And since none of us are perfect, God came to earth in human form and that form was called Jesus Christ. **He became a human being and He lived a life of perfection. He died on the cross, paid for our sin and then went back to heaven.** And now you get into heaven on His ticket, if you trust Him.

Romans 6:23 says, “God's free gift is eternal life through Jesus.” **It is a gift.** That means you can't earn it, you can't work for it, you can't get good enough to deserve it. **Salvation is just a free gift.**

Think about these three things: God says you get to know Me just by trusting and if you trust My Son with your life, you get forgiveness for your past, a purpose for living in your present and a home in heaven in the future. That, my friend, is good news. And there are many, many others who would like to know what you know.

But Satan has fooled you. He has fooled you into thinking that none of your friends or the people you work with are interested in hearing the good news. **But I am telling you today that you are wrong.** **The world is hungry for good news.** They are looking for it. There is a great spiritual hunger, especially as we come into these last days. **I have discovered that the good news keeps sounding better and better because the bad news of the world keeps getting worse and worse.** Just turn on the television, or pick up today's newspaper.

That is the message – good news. Why should I share it? Why should I care about the people around me to tell them about how to get to heaven? **What is my motive?**

Love. The motive for your mission is love. **Love for Jesus and love for other people.** 2 Corinthians 5:14 says, “For the love of Christ compels us.” It is the love of God that motivates us. **We will never share the Good News until we allow God to love through us.**

You see, everybody matters to God. God has never made a person that He did not love. God made some people that I don't love and God has made a lot of people that I don't even like. **But God loves them.** The most despicable person you can imagine, God still loves them. If you are here on this earth, that means God loves you because He made you. **That means we must care because God cares.** When you express love for people it builds a bridge, it opens a door to share the good news.

When you finally love your friends enough, you are going to tell them about Jesus. When you finally love your family members – your father, your mother, your brother or sister, aunts or uncles – who don't know Christ, when you finally love them enough you are going to have the courage to tell them the good news. **Look, it's not like you are trying to give them cancer.** **It's not like you are trying to sell them swampland in Florida or get them involved in some racket or scheme or con job.** You are telling them the greatest news in the world – forgiveness of the past, power and purpose in the present and a home in heaven in the future. **You can't get that deal anywhere else.**

I challenge you to get serious about sharing the good news with the people God has put in your life. Is anybody going to be in heaven because of you?

How do I do it? How do I fulfill my mission? Two things: you have got to **show it** and you have got to **share it**.

Do you remember in school when you had to show and tell? That is what God wants you to do. He wants you to **visualize** the gospel with your life and He wants you to **verbalize** the gospel with your mouth. **God is looking for audio-visual Christians.** Walk the walk and talk the talk. **Demonstrate it and communicate it.**

Colossians 3:17 says, “Whatever you do or say, let it be as a representative of the Lord Jesus.” **You need to be an example of God’s love first.** You need to live in a way that demonstrates God’s love. People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care. **You demonstrate it.** You show love. You let it be your life be your witness to what God has done for you.

Not only do I need to live it, I need to tell it. Colossians 4:5 says, “Make the most of your chances to tell others the good news.” It is not enough just to live it, you have to go and tell. **You have to be an audio-visual Christian.**

God wants to use you. **Who have you cared enough to tell?** **Who are you taking to heaven with you?** **Please do not be satisfied with just being saved – finish the course!** Eternity is in the balance here.

If you have never been saved, why not today?

Everyone please stand for prayer.

Father,

Help me to understand the greatness of my salvation. Help me to realize that I really do have something good to share with those around me who are lost. Give me the courage to fulfill Your mission for my life. In Jesus’ name. Amen.