WITNESS: THE GREAT COMMISSION 6

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Category: Bible & Mission

In comparing Luke and Matthew's record of Jesus last command to his disciples, it is interesting to note that Luke emphasises the action of the disciples (be my witnesses, telling people everywhere) whereas Matthew also stresses the response (make disciples, teach them to obey...). There may be a significance to this, but it escapes me for the moment, meanwhile, on with the post.

Acts 1:8

> *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhereâ€"in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.â€*

Following on from the previous post which looked at the Holy Spirit, I'd like to turn now to the issue of being Jesus' witnesses. Being a witness is a fairly straightforward activity - you tell people what you have seen and experienced. Or in the words of the passage, "telling people about me". It isn't rocket science, though as many of us find, it can be difficult in our secular world to gather the courage to tell people about Jesus - that's where the power of the Spirit is so important.

I think there are three important issues to highlight on this theme.

We Are Jesus' Witnesses. It should go without saying, but our role is not to witness to or promote our church, our denomination, our favourite Christian music or whatever. These things may all be a support and help in witnessing to Jesus, but they should never be the centre of what we talk about. If you are constantly inviting people to come and hear your favourite preacher but never inviting them to meet Jesus, then something has gone wrong.

We also need to remember that we aren't Paul's witnesses. For many Christians, Paul's logical approach is easier to follow and make sense of than Jesus' parables and story telling. Be that as it may, our job is to tell people about Jesus. Paul can help us do that, but he should never be in focus.

Witnessing to Jesus is pointing people to a person so that they can come to know him for themselves. It isn't aboutÂ simple slogans - even if they are taken from the Bible. Holding up a placard saying "John 3:16" at a sporting event just blocks the view for the guy behind you.

We Witness to the Biblical Jesus. We need to be familiar with the Gospels and with Jesus as he is portrayed in them. Jesus doesn't fit nicely into our theological categories, but that doesn't mean that we are at liberty to squeeze him into moulds of our own devising. We have to witness to him as the Scriptures talk about him. This means taking into account his historical and religious background. He was a first century Jew and lived his life in the light of the Old Testament story of Israel. We can't make him out to be an early 21st century lifestyle guru. The Jesus of the Bible is a figure who lives at the centre of God's massive story of reconciliation and we have to reflect that.

We Witness to the Present Jesus. Matthew tells us that Jesus promised to be with his disciples until

the end of the world and we need to be able to witness to his presence and action in our lives. This witness needs to be up to date. All to often people view a testimony as the story of how we were converted. However not everyone has a dramatic conversion story and for others the story of their conversion is so far in the past that it is only of interest to historians! I became a believer in 1974. That is thirty-seven years ago, the long-haired teenager who 'accepted Christ' that evening hasn't existed for a long time. I've grown and become a different person. If the only thing I can say about Christ working in my life goes back to my childhood, not only is my testimony boring, but my spiritual life must be in a right mess too! (But if you really want to hear the story of my childhood, you can do so here.)

In closing, I'd just like to say a few words about finishing or completing our witness for Christ. There are those whose whole approach to the 'Great Commission' is predicated on the idea that we can and should accomplish it at some point. I've already Christ's order to the Church is not something that can actually be completed as such. So, when will we finish witnessing? Never! Even if the whole world were Christian, we would have the glorious obligation of telling people about Jesus and what he has done. Bearing witness to the amazing things that Christ has accomplished is an ongoing joy. I reckon it will be a full time job in eternity!

In the next post, we will start to look at the things that Matthew said that Luke omitted.

In case you are wondering, none of the images in this series have anything to do with the subject. The presence of a warthog on this post is purely serendipitous.