

St. Paul the Apostle
Evangelical
Orthodox Church

TEACHING SERIES



**Reinterpreting
The Great Commission**

Bp. Joshua Beecham

Week 1: Introduction & the Creation Mandate

Introduction

"...All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always."

(Matt. 28:18)

Almost every good evangelically minded Christian recognizes that familiar Scripture, referred to as the Great Commission. If you are from an Evangelical background, what memories does that invoke? What talk and activities were attached to that theme?

Evangelism has always been one of the defining characteristics of Evangelicalism. And, though its message is often overly simplistic and unbalanced, it does keep at the forefront an aspect of the faith that should be normative for the Church. We are called to be witnesses of Christ, of the good news, faithfully working to call others to the one true God, apart from whom they will be eternally lost. Do we feel that burden and passion for the world that sent Christ to the cross? We can thank our Evangelical brothers and sisters for at least striving to keep that emphasis alive.

However, divorced from the fullness of orthodox Christianity, divorced from the fullness of the whole Biblical narrative of both Old and New Testaments, such an emphasis can lead to great confusion and frustration – specifically, when the Great Commission is separated from the original commission in Genesis.

The Creation Mandate

In *Your Work Matters to God*, Sherman and Hendriks identify four assumptions that lie behind the belief that evangelism should be a Christian's only real priority. They are:

- 1. That God is more interested in the soul than the body;**
- 2. That the things of eternity negate the importance of the things of time;**
- 3. That life divides into two categories, the sacred and the secular; and**
- 4. That clergy, missionaries, other ministers and ministries, etc., are more important than other kinds of works.**

These views are informed primarily by Platonic dualism, and they are not representative of orthodox Christianity. One way to overcome this particular dualistic mindset, while preserving an appropriate emphasis on evangelism, is to re-examine the theology behind the two great commissions of creation and salvation (the Creation Mandate of Genesis 1:28 and the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18ff [Mark, Luke, & John]). Tonight we will concern ourselves with the first of those.

Turn in your Bibles to Genesis 1:28 and let's read the original commission, referred to as the Cultural or Creation Mandate. *"And God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over every living thing that moves upon the earth...'"*

Now, it is helpful to unpack that a bit and take a closer look at it. What is being said here? To what is God commissioning mankind?

If we back up a couple of verses, we find that this is in the context of God creating man in His image. In verse 26 we read this: *"Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.'"*

So, we can see by the context, that the commissioning of mankind is directly related to being created in God's image. Generally speaking, mankind is commissioned to be and act according to the image of God. Now, let's look more closely at verse 28.

There are several words here that we would do well to consider more carefully, because some of their meaning is lost in the translation from Hebrew or Greek to English:

1. **Bless (barak/eulogeo)** – Everything else in this verse flows from and expresses God’s blessing. To bless is to speak something good into someone’s life; and we know when God speaks, things happen, for His word doesn’t return to Him void of having accomplished its purpose. It’s also incredible to note the reverence/honor that God gave to mankind, for the Hebrew word “barak” means to kneel!
2. **Be Fruitful (parah/auxano)** – The Hebrew “parah” means to bear fruit, and the Greek “auxano” means to grow up/mature (same word used in 1 Peter 2 – “*As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may **grow** thereby.*”) This word has to do more here with spiritual development/fruitfulness than with reproduction. St. Gregory of Nyssa and others interpret it that way as well.
3. **Multiply (rabah/plethuno)** – This more directly addresses numerical growth, the implication being by reproduction; which was likely different before the fall.
4. **Fill (male/pleroo)** – The Hebrew means to fill up with abundance and to consecrate, and the Greek means to furnish or complete or fulfill. A number of commentators have understood this to mean that God was giving mankind the great honor and dignity to use the resources at his disposal to be creative like God, fulfilling the purpose of all matter to glorify God and to reflect His beauty – i.e. to create cultures that manifest with great creative diversity the manifold characteristics of God.
5. **Subdue (kabash/katakurieuo)** – Part of the Greek is the same word used to address the Lord as Lord – kyrie. In other words mankind is being commissioned to exercise lordship in the image of God, benevolently caring for the rest of creation.
6. **Have dominion (radah/archomai)** – The Hebrew means to rule and the Greek to have precedence over the rest of creation.

So, putting all of that together this might be how the verse would read: *"And God spoke this blessing into them, 'Grow into My likeness, and multiply, and abundantly furnish and complete all that I have made, and exercise My benevolent lordship and care over it, for I give you precedence over every living thing that moves upon the earth ...'"*

This describes ordinary mankind. These are the ordinary categories of human experience as spoken by God, which is to live in relationship with God and others, caring for each other and all creation, manifesting the relational Life of God, and enjoying and creating beauty in the image and after the likeness of God. Many have summed up this commission in the word "culture," believing that the creation of cultures in their broadest sense is what is described here.

This commission includes a blessing on godly human labor, not pitting spirit against matter or time against eternity or soul against body, or some labor as being more spiritual than others. It describes humans as walking in communion with God and each other, doing very ordinary things without sin, taking what God has given and creating other things with it, manifesting the glory of God's image and growing more and more in His likeness.

Conclusion

As we will see next week, the Great Commission accounts do not discard this but rather they restore it. And what's more, the whole story of the Bible ends with a surprising picture that we don't often pay much attention to. It doesn't end with all cultures being annihilated or vaporized and the Kingdom of God erasing everything else. What does it say? *"By (the light of the Heavenly City) shall the nations walk; and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it...; they shall bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations."* (Rev. 21:24-26)

Martin Luther said something very interesting. He said, *"If I knew Jesus would return tomorrow, I would plant a tree today."* What do you suppose he may have meant by that?

** Please see the disclaimer at the end of this booklet regarding source material.*

Week 2: The Great Gospel Commission

Introduction

Last week we looked at the creation mandate. How would you sum up what we said was the intended meaning of the mandate? Filling that out even more, it was a commission to be and to act and to grow in the image and character of God, ruling as He rules, caring as He cares, loving as He loves, living in loving relationship with Him and all of creation even as He has eternally lived in relationship. In New Testament language it was a mandate to share in the three-fold ministry of priest, prophet, and king – to lift up all of creation in prayer and thanksgiving to God, to bear His Word to all that lives, and to rule over creation as ambassadors of His benevolent reign. It was a commission to be good stewards of all that He had made and to share in His creative and productive energies: to grow and develop personally and to grow and develop the earth. This is sometimes referred to as the Cultural Mandate as well, because it is out of this commission that all the cultures of the world have sprung.

Of course, as we all know, a major threat entered the world and seduced mankind to become discontented with being *like God* and synergizing together *with God* in trust and grace; Satan convinced him instead that it was nobler to desire to *be god* through knowledge. Taking his poisonous bait, mankind got hooked by vainglory, and his focus, rather than being on God and the unselfish ministry to his fellow creatures, turned inward in self-gratification.

As a result of this falling away, death and corruption entered the world and the whole created order was turned upside down. The image of God in man became less and less treasured and more and more hidden, overshadowed by another image, the image of Satan himself – flooded with self-serving knowledge but at enmity with God and His grace. All creatures were infected by this darkness and rather than living in harmonious relationship became enemies of each other as well.

None of this, however, erased the original commission of God, and some provision was made for it to still be fulfilled in a limited way; but now it was riddled with struggle and strife. Even after corruption became so bad that God cleansed the earth with a flood, the same basic commission was repeated to Noah: “*And you, increase and multiply, bring forth abundantly on the earth and have dominion over it.*” (Gen. 9:1) This is God’s mandate and desire for mankind, and it was never removed; but its ability to be fulfilled had been removed, not by God but by man. So, another way was made.

God’s very eternal Image, His own Son became human and fulfilled the purpose for which we had been created. As a man He increased in the knowledge and character and love of God, ruling as God rules, caring as He cares, loving as He loves, living in unselfish relationship with God and others, and multiplying through discipleship; He lifted up all creation in prayer and thanksgiving, was God’s Word to all that lives, and re-established God’s benevolent reign on the earth. He worked with His hands as a carpenter, sharing in the creative works of God. Although His primary mission was to defeat our enemies and undo the curse of death; by His life He showed that the fruit of that defeat was to be the restoration of all creation, the fulfillment of God’s original plan and commission.

The Gospel Commission of the New Covenant

A brief but careful look at the Gospel Commission given by Christ to the Apostles will easily show that He did not come to replace the original commission with another, but to fulfill it and restore it. Let’s take a look.

Matthew - If you will look at the chart at the end of this lesson you will see the Creation Mandate and all four versions of the Gospel commission. The first Gospel account is the commission recorded in Matthew. This is the passage most associated with the Great Commission. The commission is to make disciples of all nations, best understood as all ethnic groups. It is not to make disciples *from* all ethnic groups but *of* them.

The goal is not to take people out of their culture, but to bring the light of Christ to the culture and make disciples within the culture. There is no such thing as a generic, un-enculturated Christian life and message.

And how are disciples made? – By baptizing them and teaching them what Christ taught. A conversion, a transformation is required. We must be delivered from sin and death and born anew into Christ. But is this not placing us back into the relationship that we were created to live in? And what were the prominent themes of Christ's teachings? – were they not primarily about sacrificial love, about caring for one another in humility and meekness, and about being good stewards of the gifts of God? Doesn't that sound like the original mandate?

Mark - In Mark we specifically read that the gospel is for the whole world and the whole creation. Great power is given by God to bring about the redemption and renewal of the earth, the body, the heart, the mind, and the cultures of the world. It is a message that reconciles us with all of creation – it rescues us from unbelief and its fruits, but not from the commission that was given at creation.

Luke – The essential message from Luke's commission account is that all have betrayed the Creator and need to repent and receive the forgiveness offered to us in Jesus Christ, which was made possible by His bodily death & resurrection. Those who do so become witnesses. But of what are we witnesses? We are primarily witnesses of that same bodily death and resurrection, which reinforces that this is not just about the soul or spirit, but encompasses matter – all creation – returning us once again to God's original purposes.

John - The operative word in John's version of the commission is "sent." We are sent. And our model for being sent is how Jesus was sent by the Father. He laid aside His divine prerogatives and became enfleshed as a humble servant, taking on the flavor and cultural trappings of a Jew – as much as could be done without sin.

Likewise we are called to the same – to humbly demonstrate & culturally accommodate the gospel – the goal of which is the redemption of all creation and creatures.

Conclusion

So, what is the point of all of this? It is that the Great Commission in the Gospels assumes as its context the original commission given to Adam and Eve. It restores and renews it. Of course, the primary message now is the forgiveness, redemption, and salvation gained for us by Christ through His bodily death, resurrection, and ascension. But we are not only forgiven and redeemed and saved *from* something, we are forgiven and redeemed and saved *for* something – for the very purpose for which we were created in the first place.

The Great Commission, informed by the Creation Mandate, is not only about saving souls. It is about Christ removing the barriers and restoring people through discipleship to God's original purposes to be and to act and to grow in the image and likeness of God. For this we need to be forgiven and delivered and converted – and the good news is that we can be in Christ. But that isn't the end goal. The goal is the restoration of all things to God's creative design for us.

Therefore, discipleship must be, of course, rich in prayer, Bible study, worship and fellowship in the church; but it must also include making more disciples both through procreation and through witness, sacrificial love, and social responsibility in our families and in the world; it must include teaching people how to work, how to create, how to develop the earth. It should include how to be grateful and good stewards of what we have been given, and to use those things for good purposes to the glory of God and the benefit of each other. It is a social, earthy gospel, not as a competition against spiritual integrity, but as part of it.

COMPARISON OF THE O. T. COMMISSION ACCOUNT AND THE 4 GOSPEL COMMISSION ACCOUNTS

<p>Genesis</p> <p>1:28: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over every living thing that moves upon the earth." 2:15: "The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it."</p>	<p>Matthew</p> <p>28:18-20: "...All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always."</p>	<p>Mark</p> <p>16:15-18: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover."</p>	<p>Luke</p> <p>24:46-49: "...and He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his (Christ's) name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high."</p>	<p>John</p> <p>20:21-23: "Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, "Received the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."</p>
<p>Notes:</p> <p>Direct Greek Translation from Septuagint: "Grow in maturity and in numbers and fully furnish and consecrate the earth and care for it and protect it and rule over it." Humanly was charged with creating culture informed by their relationship with God and His Kingdom. This mandate has both social/cultural and spiritual ramifications.</p>	<p>Notes:</p> <p>Only the word "make" is in the imperative; therefore, baptizing and teaching are descriptions of how we are to make disciples. Also, it says "of" all nations (ethnic groups), not "from" all nations; we don't extract people from their cultures, but we make disciples within the cultural context, and we bring the diversity of culture into the Kingdom (Revelation 21:22-26).</p>	<p>Notes:</p> <p>Mark's understands the gospel as being for the whole world and creation. Great power is given by God to bring about the redemption and renewal of the earth, the body, the heart, the mind, and the cultures of the world. It is a message that reconciles us with all of creation – it rescues us from unbelief, not from the cultural mandate.</p>	<p>Notes:</p> <p>All have betrayed our Creator and need to repent and receive the forgiveness offered to us in Jesus Christ, gained by His death & resurrection. Those who do so become witnesses. But of what are we witnesses? We are primarily witnesses of the bodily resurrection, which reinforces that this is not just about the soul or spirit, but encompasses matter – all creation – returning us to God's original purposes.</p>	<p>Notes:</p> <p>The operative word in John's version of the commission is sent. We are sent. And our model for being sent is how Jesus was sent by the Father. He laid aside His divine prerogatives and became enlisted as a humble servant, taking on the flavor and cultural trappings of a Jew – as much as could be done without sin. Likewise we are called to the same – to humbly demonstrate culturally accommodate the goal of the gospel – the goal of which is redemption of all.</p>

Weeks 3 & 4: Application - How Shall We Stand in Witness to Christ in our Culture?

Part 1 – Reviewing the Creation Mandate as God’s Eternal Purposes

Cape Town, South Africa, in spite of the horrors of its history, has a tremendous amount of beauty. Unfortunately, when Nelson Mandela was thrown into prison on Robben Island for his efforts to end Apartheid all he could do was look on his country from afar. Seven kilometers off the coast of Cape Town, he could see the beauty of his homeland but couldn’t reach it, couldn’t get to it. So, he created a piece of it right where he was. He got permission to plant a garden in one corner of the prison yard, and it was a beautiful garden and became a refuge for prisoners and guards who shared in its bounty of vegetables and flowers.

Brothers and sisters, I would suggest to you that is the very thing we also are called to do here in our exile from our heavenly country. Regardless of what things are going on in our earthly countries, however bad it may get, and more important than any kind of Christian evangelism and activism necessary in this fallen world, we must keep in mind the original Creation Mandate of God, which is redeemed and expanded in Christ. Through the humble work we are given to do each day, in the home or outside the home, we are called to reflect the order and beauty and bounty of our heavenly homeland in communion with God. Even though the fullness of that order and beauty and bounty won’t be realized until the future kingdom, that kingdom has broken into time and space here and now, and by God’s grace we experience and manifest pieces of it in “corners” of this earthly prison yard here in this life.

I was talking with a man recently and I asked him what kind of work he does. In response he told me of the really good and prestigious job that he used to have as a graphic designer but from which he was let go because the company wasn’t doing well. Then he told me, with a bit of shame, about the current job he has, working in a factory. And in typical

Evangelical fashion, he was quick to add that there was a co-worker that was searching, and that he – the man to whom I was talking – believed that the primary reason God had him in that job was to witness to that co-worker. Did you hear that? What’s the matter with that kind of thinking? He couldn’t be there to just be a good factory worker; he must be there for some other more “spiritual” purpose or mission. What’s the matter with that kind of thinking? More importantly, how do we think about the ordinary work that we are given to do each day?

Skye Jethani, in his new book *Futureville* talks about the gift of vocation. His contention is that we have lost an earlier Christian work ethic that we once had. So, he takes us back to the Garden of Eden and helps us rediscover God’s purposes for humanity, to co-create order, beauty, and bounty through common, everyday work activities – to be fruitful and to fill the earth with God’s glory manifested in the ordinary stuff of creation. That’s what God blessed Adam and Eve to do. He gave them the garden to tend in communion with Him, then He commissioned them to take what they saw and experienced there and extend it to the rest of the earth. From that would come cities and cultures. And even though the fall distorted all of that and brought chaos and decay and scarcity, it didn’t change God’s original purposes.

The ordinary work that we do day in and day out – helping customers, doing a labor job, changing diapers, or whatever else – it matters; not just if you add some super-spiritual purpose to it, but just for what it is, in communion with God. Do we who are pastors tell that to our people? They are co-laboring with God to create order and beauty and fruitful bounty, to redeem all that is as set apart unto God.

Jesus was a carpenter, and God’s grace, though hidden in the ordinary, was fully at work in His work. The same is true of all such work, though few may perceive it. You see, the Jews were accustomed to setting people and things apart for God’s special use, and through those sanctified things they expected God to manifest His presence and His grace. But they didn’t understand that the setting apart of particular people and things in the O.T. was only meant to be an icon in this fallen

world of what God intended from the beginning to be true for all of creation – it was all set apart unto His glory, and it will be again. That is what the Son of God, by His incarnation, came to restore, to redeem everything as set apart unto God for His pleasure and glory.

That's why we treat our Sunday Liturgical gathering in a special way: not because Sunday is holy and no other day is; not because the worship space is holy and no other space is, not because the Liturgy is a holy work and no other work is. We treat Sunday's as holy and the space as holy and the work of Liturgy as holy to help teach us that all is holy. A father doesn't say to his wife and kids: "We are not going to honor each other and treat each other as special in this family because I want you to learn that all families are special." It doesn't work that way. The likely result is that those kids won't learn to treat anyone with honor if it's not modeled at home. The same is true in regards to Sundays. Orthodox Christianity amplifies the importance of our Sunday gathering in order to teach us to amplify the importance of everything else.

We don't do Sunday as a holy break from our otherwise mundane and unholy lives, we do Sunday in order to inform and transform the rest of our lives, for all is set apart unto God. Likewise, treating the Sunday work of Liturgy as holy teaches us to treat all work God gives us to do as holy. You see, all that God has been after from the very beginning, and what He seeks to restore in the New Covenant, is to have a people who call Him their God and whom He calls His people, to dwell with them and they with Him, flourishing in Him and filling the whole world with His tangible presence in all the normal activities of life, being normal everyday human beings without sin, living in a communion of trust and love and worship. That's the original purposes of God restored and amplified in Christ; that's the heavenly kingdom, and we manifest "pieces" of it here and now.

Now, you may be wondering what all of that has to do with standing and bearing witness to Christ in our countries and cultures. My point in starting with the original mandate of God to be fruitful and fill the earth with the glories of His

kingdom expressed in the ordinary is so that we don't lose sight of that goal. That is what the future kingdom is all about. That's why the Apostle Paul tells the saints in the church of Thessalonica to "aspire to live quietly, mind your own affairs, and work with your hands." That's the life of the future kingdom, a life of peace, a life without fear, and we manifest something of it even now in this fallen world. That witnesses to the real goal and purpose of all things.

The ultimate goal is not evangelization. The ultimate goal is not the eradication of homosexuality, the elimination of AIDS, an end to abortion, the termination of violence and bloodshed, or any other political or social issue. Such actions, while they may be part of our witness in this fallen world, as we shall see in part 2, are not the end goal. The ultimate goal is renewed and restored human life, or rather divine life lived out in human beings doing every day normal human things in communion with God and by His grace. Living that kind of life and manifesting something of the order and beauty and bounty and peace and joy of the future kingdom in whatever corner of the prison yard we have been given, fearlessly living a redeemed and resurrected life in quiet assurance, is the first and most important way that we witness to the risen Christ who has and is redeeming all things. While others are frantic and fearful, however well they may mask it, we witness to Christ by peacefully doing the ordinary things He has given us to do with extraordinary grace in communion with God and each other. As St. Seraphim of Serov so wisely put it, "Acquire peace and thousands around you will find their salvation."

Part 2 –Gospel Mandate & God's Temporal Purposes

While living in a future-kingdom kind of way, quietly and peacefully in communion with God and unto His glory in the ordinary things of life, is the first and ultimate way that we bear witness to the risen Christ, we all know that there are a multitude of enemies that war against such a life in this fallen world. Satan and his demons are constantly sowing chaos and hideous ugliness and depravity, and they do not speak with soft voices. They scream at us with intensity and actively pursue allegiance from us and from all of mankind. Through

sin and death, they dumb down and darken the minds and reasoning of fallen humanity, and by aggressive deception they distort the truth. They sway people to embrace what is evil as if it is good and good as if it is evil. That is why Christ came preaching and teaching and healing and casting out demonic strongholds; and it's why He still carries on those same ministries through the Church today. So, the second way that we bear witness to Christ in this fallen world is by resisting the powers of darkness and by publicly standing for righteousness and godliness, sharing in the ministry of Christ, not as moralistic prigs but as those who manifest Him who is light and in whom there is no darkness, as bearers of light and joy.

In Ephesians 5 the Apostle Paul says this: "Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore, it says, 'Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.'"

This passage obvious calls us to more than a passive kind of faith. Christ did not model passive faith; He lived a kingdom life, and he also responded to this world with action. One of my favorite Evangelical preachers and teachers is Pastor Tony Evans, and he said something once that has stuck with me, something that kind of echoes the same sentiment as that passage from Ephesians. He said, "Everyone else seems to be coming out of the closet. Isn't it time for Christians to do the same?" We are given a share in Christ's ministry to preach and to heal and to drive out the powers of darkness, to lead people from darkness to light and from death to life. While some of us are called to specific ministries for that purpose – pastors or evangelists or missionaries or monks or nuns or Christian musicians or Christian apologists or Christian activists or some other such thing, all Christians are called to stand in witness to Christ in the public arena.

My wife, Kathy, is an executive assistant in a large international company, and she works right in the midst of the highest-ranking executives of the company, the seats of power. And sometimes that power is used to aggressively pursue ungodly agendas. There have been times when she has been asked to participate in those agendas in ways that would clearly go against godliness and ultimately require her to deny Christ and the ways of His kingdom. So, she has had to stand up to those powerful people. In one particular case, one of her bosses, who happens to also be on the board of Planned Parenthood, the largest provider of abortion in our country, wanted Kathy to help her do things that specifically would benefit and promote Planned Parenthood. Subsequently, Kathy sat down with her boss and told her that she could not help her with anything related to Planned Parenthood and why.

On another occasion she was being expected to support the political activism of the company in favor of homosexuality and gay marriage, and once again she found herself in her boss' office. These are two issues that our society has highlighted, forcing Christians to respond, even though there are many other sins that affect our culture. In both cases Kathy explained in her naturally sweet, loving voice that while she would treat everyone with dignity and respect – which they saw her do over and over again – and while she would give of herself 110% to her work – which they also saw her do repeatedly – she could not and would not do things that were directly contrary to her faith. She was not belligerent or mean about it, but she was insistent and firm in love, and because she is so widely respected for her work ethic and her loving treatment of people, her boss not only complied with her wishes but also, with tears in her eyes, said Kathy was a model to her.

People are used to encountering Christians in one of two ways: either as weak, spineless pushovers or as radical whackos. The first group they suck in, the other group they mock and dismiss; but they don't quite know what to do with, and they are disarmed by, a Christian who is loving and compassionate and honoring and yet uncompromising in their Christian convictions.

Our weapons are not worldly, but nonetheless we do wield weapons. We are called to stand in the midst of darkness and ignorance and the ugliness of sin and death and depravity and witness to Him who is light and revelation and beauty and life in abundance.

Let me ask you a question: Do you believe that, apart from divine intervention, the condition of every person in this world – me, you, your relatives, your friends, your co-workers, your neighbors – is that each one, to one degree or another, is ignorant, sick in their soul, and in bondage? If you don't, then Jesus' ministry and that to which He commissions His disciples makes absolutely no sense, let alone have any relevance for today.

Why evangelize and heal and drive out demons if all is well? You see, here is our problem: Civilization and technology and sophistication and affluence in our materialistic Western societies give people a false sense that everything is pretty much ok. And in poverty-stricken countries like much of Africa or Latin America, the idolatrous pursuit of civilization and technology and sophistication and affluence gives people a false hope that if they have those things everything will be ok. But as good as those things are in their proper place, they often create an illusion that hides the real problem. That's partly why God allows suffering; it gets our attention and shatters the illusion. Affluence and materialism, or the idolatrous pursuit of them, can mask the deep and true needs of the soul. When those things are present it's easy to start thinking that everything is or will be relatively fine and to forget that we are ignorant, sick, and in bondage. Those things can do nothing to deliver us from our real enemies. Even in an affluent society people are still in great need of teaching, healing, and deliverance. Don't let the mask fool you.

So, into the midst of this the Lord calls men and women, boys and girls, among His followers to be His voice to speak and His hands to heal and His instruments to crush demonic strongholds and break down prison walls of darkness through love and truth. He calls us to cut through the thick cloud of confusion and deception with compassionate clarity. And to

one degree or another, all who live in such godliness, St. Paul says, will suffer persecution. To bear witness to Christ is to be martyred at some level. At the very heart of our faith, we are called daily to die to our own lives and live unto Christ, and we can expect that such a life will be tested. All of us will be called upon to stand in witness of Christ and His kingdom in our daily activities and encounters, and some of us may be called to physically suffer for it.

A few weeks ago, we had a young lady from China, Sarah Liu, come and speak during at our church. She is with the organization Voice of the Martyrs, which brings awareness and assistance to Christians in countries where they are highly persecuted. She told her story of being tortured and imprisoned for 6 years for her faith. She still bears some of the scars of her torture. She refused to deny Christ and she refused to sell out her brothers and sisters, and she suffered for it. In most of our countries, at least right now, Christianity is mostly just marginalized and mocked rather than forbidden and physically persecuted, but marginalization and mockery are still persecution, and our response is a good litmus test for how we might respond under physical persecution.

As it was in Christ's day, it is still the same today. The gospel still needs to be preached. The sick still need to be healed. And if we don't think demonic strongholds still need to be driven out, our head is in the sand. St. Anthony the Great said, "A time is coming when men will go mad, and when they see someone who is not mad, they will attack him, saying, 'You are mad; you are not like us.'" That just as accurately describes our time as it has any other time, and demonic strongholds lurk behind every such deluded madness. All of us are called to manifest something of Christ's ministry in the daily activities of life, in our families, in our jobs, in our neighborhoods, etc., and some of us He calls to specifically apostolic and evangelistic and prophetic and exorcistic ministries.

Some of us older guys took up that torch many years ago, and some of you younger people are being called to take it up now in a culture that is in many ways more indifferent and even hostile to Christianity than what we encountered 30-40

years ago, but the truth of God and His grace to walk in it and to proclaim it in love are the same yesterday, today, and forever.

However, everyone isn't called to such specific Christian ministries; yet, every Christian is a minister. As I said in Part I, you don't need some other more spiritual purpose to make whatever job you have been given valuable and spiritual, at least from the perspective of the future kingdom. And yet, at the same time, in this fallen world, through your work and along with your work God will anoint you in one way or another to teach, to heal, and to drive out demons – outside the home and in your home. Everywhere we are, we are teaching, at the very least by our lives and sometimes with our lips. Everywhere we are, we are offering ourselves, through our work or along with our work, to bring healing to others through a kind word, a kind deed, or speaking the truth in love. And everywhere we are we help establish something of the kingdom reign of Christ and we drive out, or at least hold back, the tyranny of Satan.

Conclusion

So, the first and foremost way that we bear witness to Christ is by manifesting something of the peaceful order and beauty and bounty of the future kingdom here and now in whatever corner of the prison yard we have been given. And the second way that we stand in witness to Christ, and just as necessary in this fallen world, is to share in His ministry. In one way or another we are all called to teach and to heal and to drive out demonic strongholds, in whatever God gives us to do. In both of those ways we bear powerful witness to the risen Christ in our countries and in our cultures by the power of the Holy Spirit.

I will end with a story. Our son, Jon, has, in the last couple of years, become an avid bicycle racer, having raced now in around 20 races, mostly recently placing 3rd in the state championship. But his bicycle racing career started pretty humbly way back when he was 6 or 7 years old. We lived in an apartment complex in Illinois and some of the kids in the neighborhood discovered that there was a mound of dirt at

the back of the complex, and they were using it like a ramp to ride their bikes over. They would ride real fast and hit the ramp so that they and their bikes would fly off the ground for a second or two of absolute adrenaline rush. Jon came home all excited one day and wanted Kathy and me to go with him and watch him ramp his bike. So, we went to the back of the complex and stood off to the side as he sat on his bike about 50 feet from the ramp, preparing to impress us with his daring feat. He took off and started pedaling as fast as those little legs could go, and when he got to the ramp, he quickly jerked up on his handlebars in order to fly as high in the air as possible. Right at that moment, his handlebars, which were apparently not tightly fastened to the frame, came loose from the rest of the bike. The bike dropped to the ground and Jon and the handlebars kept flying. It was hilarious, but he was humiliated, so Kathy and I tried hard not to laugh.

So, what is the point of this story? Life with God is a journey in which we are called often times to do some rather daring things, to step out in faith and be willing to leave the ground, so to speak, and trust God to take care of us. That's how I see the more active and public ways we bear witness to Christ. They stretch our faith and are often filled with great momentary exhilaration, but we must not live for those things and try to make more of them than what they are. And in order to make sure we remain whole and return to being grounded in living the eternal kingdom, our zealous and daring works must be connected to the frame – they must be connected to a life of quiet, peaceful communion with God expressed through the ordinary activities of daily life in love and in truth. In this way our whole lives bear witness to Christ and give glory to God.

That is what God intended for us from the beginning, and that has never changed. All that He has and is doing in Christ serves to restore us to that end. We experience a foretaste of it in this fallen world, and we will experience it in fullness in the age to come. There God's desire will be fully fulfilled – that He will have a people that He can call His own, and that we will be thrilled to call Him our God and to live in blessed communion with Him and with each other.

Note: Skye Jethani's book, *Futureville*, which I highly recommend, is heavily quoted in the second section of this booklet. Direct quotes are not in quotations because there are so many of them, and I felt the constant use of quotation marks would make the material difficult to read. Please let this disclaimer suffice: much of this material, while reworked and edited for the purpose of this booklet, is not original material but leans substantially upon thoughts from Skye's book. Also, the first part of the booklet was drawn from various online material read in my research but which I have since lost track of and therefore cannot credit any sources. I think that I have sufficiently presented these thoughts reworked into my own material and the purpose of this booklet so as to avoid any plagiarism. If I have not and anyone discovers a direct connection with any other document, please let me know and I will make appropriate notations of such.

