

Focus on Your Mission – Matthew 28:16-20

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How many of you make “To-Do” lists? (How many of those are actually “Honey-do” lists? 😊.) For those who make those lists, what do you have as some to-do items? Perhaps a better question: WHY do you make those lists?

Perhaps I am not like most of you. I know “Achiever” is one of my top five Clifton Strengths. Perhaps I don’t know what “Achiever” means. But, I know one of the reasons why I like to make a list goes beyond just making sure I remember to accomplish those items. Perhaps the main reason I make those lists is so that I CAN CROSS OFF those items. To achieve! Accomplishment!

Do you ever put items on your list that may seem impossible to achieve or accomplish? Or perhaps they will take a long time to achieve or accomplish, such as getting a Masters in some area of focus. That is not something which you can easily cross off. How many of you have an item like that, one you know will never be crossed off? We don’t like to put those on our lists. They are not fun. We can’t achieve those. And it stares at us from the list, mocking us that there will be no way to get this accomplished!!! I don’t like that.

But here is my hope for today...that ALL of you will add such an item on your LIFE list, which will never be crossed off.

Let’s get into God’s Word. The main portion today is from Matthew 28. This lesson speeds us a head a little. We celebrated Easter not too long ago. The next celebration would be Ascension. This is where Jesus went back into heaven...ascended. And here is where we find ourselves this morning: Listen to these words: **16 Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. 18 Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”**

We have reached the final week of our FOCUS series. A little recap: The previous three sessions were: Focus on the Good, on Christ and on Your Future. This week is Focus on Your Mission. I will call it your To Do List. Just think about those words I read to you. Those are not suggestions. Those are commands. Do this and this and this. Jesus has given each of us a to do list. Go, Make, Baptize, Teach. I think that is a To Do list, right?

This past week we had a pastors’ conference. We begin every conference every time with a worship service. Now there are several times I wish I could just shut off my brain and just listen. During a conference’s sermon, that would probably be one of those times. However, my brain doesn’t want to shut down and listen. And although my thoughts were on the same topic as the sermon, they went in a different direction. AND since I have the mic and you do not, you are kinda forced to travel down my thought journey with me.

Here is that journey. What did Jesus promise when he ascended into heaven? He told us while on earth, he said these words: **Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am** (John 14:1-3).

What is his promise? He is preparing a place for us. What is that place? Heaven. Great words of comfort. But what did he say he was going to do? **TAKE YOU TO BE WITH ME!** Rescue us. Perhaps your thought journey has already taken you to this place, but question: What is earth to God now? We know what it was intended to be. It was to be paradise. There was a time when God walked in the cool of the day with his people. There was a time when God came to this earth because...he wanted to, because it was a joy-filled time. No sin. Now what is Jesus’ promise? To TAKE us from this place. Why? Well, that is my question yet.

What is earth to God NOW? I defined it this way: Hell, with hope. If you disagree with that thought journey, that is ok. I am ok with being wrong. But think about it. Why did Jesus want to prepare a new place for us? Why did he promise to TAKE us from this place to that new place? Is it because this place is so fun and he doesn’t want us to have fun? No. It is because he knows something about this place. It is infected with the ugly poison of sin. Sin isn’t that little cute thing we do. Sin isn’t just a slap on the wrist and a warning, “Oh try not to do that again!” Sin is poison. That lie you told; that thought you hold on to; that greed which entrenches your motives. It is poison which has infested our every fiber. Sometimes it masks itself as ‘fun’ ‘full of pleasure’ ‘honest mistake.’ What did that sin do? It stares at you every time you enter this building. That sin created the cross. It tore open

Jesus' back. It dug thorns into Jesus' scalp. It pierced his hands and feet with a rusty nail. It slashed open his side where blood and water flowed. It placed Jesus' lifeless body in a temporary grave of stone.

Why? Because earth is different now than when God created it. We are told in Colossians 1:13-14: **For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.**

Why would Jesus need to rescue us if this earth was paradise? Because this earth is not paradise. Jesus can see that. Jesus knows that. Jesus died for that. Hell...but with hope. Where is the hope? It goes back to that first passage. Yes, Jesus promised to prepare a place and take us to that place. But until that happens, what did he promise? **Surely, I am with you always to the very end of the age.** Until that very end of this world, he gives us hope. He will not leave us. Even though this world is not what he created, even though there is the poison of sin everywhere, Jesus made a choice, a promise – I will not leave you. It gives us hope, the only hope. Hell...with hope.

You know that message. You heard that message again at Easter. He has risen! He has risen indeed! Alleluia! Why do we say those words? Because of Jesus' promise: **Because I live, you too will live** (John 14:19). So, we shout ALLELUIA!

You know that message. You believe that message. Now what? That brings me back to my thought journey and our To Do list. What is that thought journey? Well, what could Jesus do? Knowing this is hell but with hope, he could simply rescue us all and take us immediately to heaven. He didn't do that. Ok. Now what? He could send his angels, after all an angel is a MESSENGER! He doesn't do that. What does he do? He gives us his To Do list: GO, MAKE, BAPTIZE, TEACH. Focus on your mission.

Well, what is your mission?

All this made me think: What are you to the devil? Yes, we are his prey. The Bible says this: **Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour** (1 Peter 5:8). But why does he want to devour you? Because...and I hope this causes a few goosebumps to tingle your skin...YOU are the devil's GREATEST THREAT! He knows he can't defeat Jesus. That battle is done and over. The angels are not coming right now to fight. No. What is left? You. Equipped with the devil-destroying weapon, the very words of God that Jesus wants you to use to GO, MAKE, BAPTIZE, TEACH. The very message which is so powerful and so sharp that it **is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow** (Hebrews 4:12). You have that word. The devil hates it. He flees from it. He wants to devour you before you use it. Instead, pierce the devil's heart with it! GO, MAKE, BAPTIZE, TEACH.

But what does that To Do list look like? Does it mean you have to be a missionary or pastor or teacher? Perhaps. Just like with every pastor or teacher, I am going to need someone to take my place someday.

But perhaps it looks different for you. Perhaps it takes the form of a caring coworker or friend. Life hit hard; they see no end in sight, no positive outcome...door open for you to GO, MAKE, TEACH. Perhaps it is in the form of a neighbor who is looking for answers to questions, no church home because perhaps no one invited...door open for you to GO, MAKE, TEACH. Or perhaps it is in the form of a parent responding to the cries from the other room as their new baby needs to be comforted and the best comfort the baby can receive comes from your very lips in the form of a half-sleepy, half-frustrated version of Jesus Loves Me This I Know. GO, MAKE, TEACH.

What does that do? It drives the sword of the Spirit directly into the heart of the devil and crushes his hopes and dreams and drives him to the place where it is called hell...but with NO hope. You are the greatest threat to the devil! Not because you are strong but because Jesus is and because he has given you the strength of his Word. His Word which created this world, his Word which changes hearts, his Word which declares IT IS FINISHED and you are forgiven!

So, back to the To Do list. I said it was my goal to make a list which we will never cross off. Focus on Your Mission.

Let's pray: Loving Jesus, thank you for showing us your love and what that love was willing to do. You went to the cross. You took our sin. You forgave us and promise us heaven. But you have also given us the power of your Word to GO, MAKE, TEACH others so others can hear, learn and be saved. Give us confidence to trust your promises that you will be with us always, including those times when we share you with others. Bless us. Amen.