

SERIES – “The Mission: Joining God in His Work”

Christ Came with a Mission – Philippians 2:5-11 – April 15, 2018

INTRODUCTION

The Secret Millionaire was a reality TV series in which super-wealthy individuals or couples live undercover for a week in an impoverished or deprived community. I got caught up in a few episodes when it was still on. The millionaires willingly volunteer to leave their homes, conceal their identities, and deny themselves the privileges of fortune in order to live in poverty.

Having physically relocated to a neighborhood in need, the millionaires share the living conditions of their new neighbors by taking residence in a local housing project and cutting themselves back to welfare-level wages. They intentionally connect with the community by living among the people and identifying with their experiences. Their nearness allows them to observe real life and real situations. It also provides opportunities to connect with their neighbor’s struggles, share in their distresses, and grieve their lack of basic necessities.

Watching and listening, the millionaires consider what could be done to relieve the suffering around them and improve the lives of their new neighbors. On the last day before returning to paradise, the millionaires reveal their true identities and surprise a person or group of people with a generous endowment from their own fortunes.

The Secret Millionaire offers a great example of how an empathetic presence, generous provisions, and empowered people can help make tough circumstances better. It also offers a helpful reminder of what Jesus did – and is still doing – for all of us and through all of us.

God sent His one and only Son into the world to bring lasting solutions to the lingering problems of others. He came both to save and to serve.

KNOW AND UNPACK THE STORY – Philippians 2:5-11

It’s often difficult to explain biblical concepts in a short and simple way. That’s true today, and it was also true in the early church. That’s one of the reasons Christians have treasured the words of Philippians chapter 2, which was our 1st reading today. Known as the “Hymn to Christ,” this passage captures both Jesus’ identity and His mission in the world. Listen again to verses 6-8:

“...Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God something to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” Phil. 2:6-8

CHRIST CAME TO SERVE GOD

There’s a common misperception regarding the reasons for Jesus’ presence in our world. Specifically, many people believe humanity was the driving force behind the incarnation – that Jesus came to us simply because we needed Him so desperately.

It’s certainly true that humanity needed Christ, and still needs Christ. We are hopeless without Him. Yet, it’s important to understand that God was the primary motivation for Jesus’ incarnation. Not us.

In Philippians 2:6-7, Paul reinforced the truth that Jesus is God. The Son has always existed “in the form of God.” However, in order to accomplish God’s mission to redeem the world Jesus willingly “emptied Himself” in order to take on the form of man. Specifically, Paul said Jesus became “a servant or slave” – but not to us. Jesus was never a slave or servant of humanity. Rather, Jesus willingly emptied Himself in order to serve God. Verse 8 continues that same idea: by humbling Himself, Jesus was obedient to God’s will, not to our needs.

Jesus understood that His mission was to serve God and glorify Him. It’s great news for us that by doing so, He became our salvation. As disciples of Jesus, then, we’re called to the same mission and carry the same purpose – to serve God and honor Him.

CHRIST CAME TO SET US FREE

Here’s another misconception regarding Jesus’ mission in our world: that it began at Christmas. Many people believe that Jesus’ birth was the start of God’s mission to save humanity from our sins.

Instead, the incarnation was a crucial event in the middle of God’s larger plan to set humanity free from the bondage of sin – a plan that stretched all the way back to those first moments after Adam and Eve were exiled from the Garden of Eden.

Jesus is our salvation, which means He is our only hope to experience freedom in a spiritual sense. Jesus’ death and resurrection are the only door through which we can pass to receive forgiveness and spiritual life.

Yet, spiritual freedom isn’t the only type of freedom Jesus offers those who will follow Him. He can also set us free from our fears and our doubts. He can set us free from emotions that overwhelm us. He can set us free from physical or financial burdens that weigh us down. He can even set us free from the need to control every aspect of our lives and to solve our problems in our own strength – if we let Him.

In short, Jesus can unshackle us from lives focused on temporary struggles and set us free to participate in the glorious unfolding of God’s mission for the world.

Of course, when Jesus sets us free, He also calls us to serve as both witnesses and neighbors to those still stuck in the bondage of their sin. We can join Jesus in His mission for the world. We can join Jesus in His mission on a very practical level. Specifically, we can be:

- **God’ messengers.** Jesus shared the good news of the gospel with clarity and variety. He communicated in ways that were mindful of the personalities of individual hearers, was relevant to their culture, and was sensitive to their needs. Likewise, serving God faithfully requires us to be competent, creative, and confident messengers of His salvation. We are called to spread the good news.
- **God’s ministers.** Throughout His ministry, Jesus took notice of those who needed help. His mission was primarily spiritual, yet He still took the time to focus on physical needs and earthly troubles. He ministered to the poor, the captives, the blind, and the oppressed – and He has called us to do the same.

- **God's missionaries.** Just as Jesus left paradise in order to save us, we are called to go out of our comfort zones in order to make a difference in the world. This may mean going out into our neighborhoods, going out into our country, or going out across the world. The key is obedience to God's leading and a willingness to go in order to serve those in need.

Jesus came to be obedient to His Father's will by serving and honoring God, and saving us. Jesus met the spiritual needs of those He encountered and those He sought out. As His faithful disciples, we now are called to go and do likewise. In Jesus, amen.