

## **What In The World Is God Up To?**

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**Rich Nathan**

**January 22-23, 2005**

**Blessed to be a Blessing Series**

**Matthew 28:16-20**

I've been doing a series that I've titled "Blessed to be a Blessing." I received a lovely note from a woman in our congregation named Jillian that I would like to read to you.

There are many blessings that I have had, and been a part of at the Vineyard since I started coming here three years ago. The first was my salvation through Jesus Christ. I will always be grateful for my friend inviting me to this church and meeting Jesus through her invitation and friendship. Another thing that really has blessed me at Vineyard Columbus is my women's group Sister's of Tabitha.

On May 16, 2003 I was listening to the message that Rich was giving on Acts 9:36 and the Holy Spirit came over me and I wanted to serve my community and spread the message of Jesus. My grandmother had recently passed away and one of the ways she had served in her church was by sewing baby blankets for local hospitals. I didn't know how to sew, but I began to pray that God would use me and give me wisdom on how to serve. I had a dream about a woman I had met that had just adopted a baby from China and I just dreamed that we were walking together and talking. I had only met her a couple times, but the next day I called her and we got our kids together and went for a walk. We were walking and I was telling her how I wanted to serve by making baby blankets and she told me about the conditions of the orphanage where she went in China to get her daughter and how she would be willing to help as well. As we were walking another friend I know that goes to Vineyard was driving by and stopped to see us. I thought of having her join us in our group. We started praying and talking and one day she just said that she would host our group and that we should donate the blankets to pro-life. Another friend of mine was praying about our group and she confirmed the feeling that it should be donated to women in crisis pregnancy. That same night I went to a woman's potluck at Vineyard and a woman at the table where my host friend sat heard us talking about our new group and she happened to be an interior designer and had a bunch of fabric she would like to donate to us. We ended up having to get a van to get it.

The next week I was talking to another woman at Vineyard and she suggested that we make these easy-tie fleece baby blankets that her daughter had. We bought some fleece and began meeting, and making baby blankets. We began planning a quilt with our donated fabric that we would collectively make to raffle off to get the funds we needed to buy more fleece. We ended up getting a big donation for the quilt and I was able to buy a lot of fleece, and it was amazing because even the women at the fabric store were asking me all kinds of questions about what we were doing and I felt the Holy Spirit come over me as I walked out with a cart overflowing with fabric.

Someone else suggested that we ask in the Mix for sewing machines that people would want to donate, and I got seven of them in the first two weeks. I gave one to a woman I met from Mexico that got involved and began sewing for us. She was nine months pregnant, with a two year old daughter and would stay up all night sewing for us because she said she couldn't sleep anyway because she was in pain from her pregnancy. She told me it made her feel good to know she was helping other women. Her husband would drop her off, she didn't drive, and we would go on walks with the kids and just talk, and I would talk to her about Jesus. When she had her baby, she called me to pray for her baby because she was in NICU and she was very sad. We prayed and her baby came home healthy and well. She recently had to go back to Mexico and we continue to talk.

God's grace has just been on this group from the beginning and we continue to be able to show His love by donating these blankets to women in crisis pregnancy at the Vineyard and to PDHC as well as for use in our reaches around the city. God continues to bring women that want to serve Him to our group. We meet with our children running all over the place, laughing, and screaming and continue to pray for each other and the women receiving the blankets, in the midst of the chaos and are still able to make a few blankets, plan projects, or take them home and work on them later. I love being a part of this group and to be used by God by doing something to spread His message of love. It continues to bless me to be a blessing to others. Still, the funniest part is that I still don't know how to sew, but God uses me anyway to invite, encourage, and experience His joy with other women that love to serve Him. I thank God for the Vineyard for being here.

I think the reason I so appreciated this email is that here is a young mom with children, who is simply trying to be obedient to God and be a blessing to others. It is Jillian's mentality, this orientation toward using whatever I have to serve others that is at the foundation of what we are trying to do as a church.

I want to ask each of you who are part of Vineyard to take the time and jot down a word of testimony concerning some way that God has blessed you through the ministry of Vineyard Columbus, or that you have had the opportunity to be a blessing through the ministry of the church. And if you have had some miracle or financial breakthrough during this giving campaign, let us know. We're going to collect those testimonies and put them in a booklet that we will hand out at the All-Church Celebration March 10<sup>th</sup>. There is information about these testimonies in your bulletin this week.

As many of you know, we are in the process of finalizing plans for building a new community center on the front of our building, facing Cooper Road. The community center is going to be about 45,000 square feet. It will be a two-story building, which will house a gym for us to expand our sports programming for kids and for adults in our neighborhood. We are going to have a room to do dance and the arts. We want to house a free medical clinic. We want to do a free legal clinic and a daycare center. We especially want to do vocational training. It is our desire in this community to add good deeds to the Good News about Jesus Christ.

#### SLIDE – Personal Contact Meetings

Personal Contact Meetings – Beginning this Monday and running each evening Monday through Friday for the next several weeks, we are holding Personal Contact meetings in the chapel from 7:30-9:00 pm. We are inviting every one of you to come out to one of these meetings to learn specific details about our

“Blessed to Be a Blessing” campaign. If you are in a small group, your group has been invited to attend together on one specific evening. If for any reason you cannot attend that particular evening or if you are not yet in a small group, please come out to one of these evenings. These important meetings begin Monday night so please make plans to attend one. Thank you.

In addition, we are going to be raising up three full teams from Vineyard Columbus to be sent out as missionary teams as unreached peoples to Asia and in Africa.

Now, I want you to mark your calendars for a couple of key events coming up in the life of our church. The biggest event that is coming up is our March 10<sup>th</sup> celebration at the Columbus Convention Center. The week of March 10<sup>th</sup>, Monday through Friday, we are canceling all church events – all small groups, all the things that normally happen here at the church – we are canceling everything and what we are going to do is pull the whole church together for a gigantic meeting down at the Columbus Convention Center. It is going to be there that you will have an opportunity to make a financial commitment to build this community center and to raise up these missionary teams. So you will want to mark your calendar for that event. It is going to be a really historic event in the life of this church. And whether you are a member of the church or not, plan to come down.

I need to mention that we are not having a separate children’s program at the Convention Center because we want to include your kids in this event. I think it will be something they will remember for decades when their church of 7000

people came together at the Columbus Convention Center. You will want your children to be a part of it. Unless you have little ones for whom a Thursday evening event would simply be inappropriate, bring your children down. You might want to start arranging childcare for little ones as soon as possible with folks outside the church.

Thursday evening, March 10<sup>th</sup>, is not a time for you to have a romantic get-away, or go on vacation, or have a baby, or have your child playing in whatever sports event they have scheduled. Ask for that time off from work. Make plans now to set that evening aside.

And you will want to mark down the personal contact meetings that I mentioned earlier.

The last calendar item that I want to mention is that we are going to have an All-Church Intercessory Prayer Meeting on Tuesday, February 1<sup>st</sup>, at 7:30 p.m. We don't think this giving campaign that we are engaged in will have blessing or success on it because we are doing it and planning it. We need to pray for God's blessing on our church and on our giving. We want to ask God's favor on the city. We want to pray for our city. And we want to pray for our world. So, please, even if you haven't been to a prayer meeting in the past, make plans to come to this prayer meeting on Feb. 1<sup>st</sup>.

Now, why are we building a community center? Why are we planning to raise up three missionary teams to be sent from Vineyard Columbus to some far off places in Africa and Asia? It all turns on our understanding of what Jesus came to do in his first coming. Certainly, Jesus came to die on a cross and rise from the dead. And through his death and resurrection, judge and condemn sin and Satan and death.

But the death and resurrection of Christ needs to be seen as the center of a much larger purpose of God in sending his son, and that was to bring about the invasion of the kingdom of God, namely God's rule and reign into our present time and space. Jesus came to begin the process of mending this broken creation – to bring about a new creation which we will not see fully until Christ returns. The kingdom of God has to do with the forgiveness of people's sins.

But the kingdom of God goes way beyond our personal salvation. The mending of this broken creation also involves the healing of people's bodies, the casting out of demons, the mending of people's marriages, the setting free of people from their addictions, the provision of meaningful work, and the dignity of work to people, the provision of medical care for those who are uninsured, care for people's children, social, economic, and political change – all of this is part and parcel of the invasion of God's kingdom into this world.

As an aside, I want to mention to you The Begin Again Weekend coming up on February 4-5<sup>th</sup>. This is an opportunity for people to mend their marriages, it's part of the Kingdom of God. Next weekend is the last chance to register.

The reason that we're building the community center, starting a daycare here, offering a variety of services, sending out missionaries is because we want to join this church to what God is doing in this world, and has been doing for 2000 years. God is on the move bringing his kingdom, fixing, mending, and recreating this world to fulfill his original creation purpose. I've called today's talk, "What In The World Is God Up To?" Let's pray.

Matthew 28:16-20

#### SLIDE

Mt 28:16 Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go.

Mt 28:17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.

Mt 28:18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Mt 28:19 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,

Mt 28:20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

What in the world is God up to? He is spreading the kingdom of God and he is doing it through ordinary people. Look at v.17 with me.

#### SLIDE

Mt 28:17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.

Why does Matthew note this divided wavering imperfect response among the disciples who saw the Risen Christ? Because Matthew wants us to understand that the spread of the kingdom of God happens through imperfect people, who live in difficult circumstances. In other words, you do not have to have it all together to be useful to God, or to be a blessing to others.

So many people have the idea that until I reach a certain level of maturity, until I get myself together; I can't really be used by God. I have nothing to offer through this community center. I couldn't possibly consider world missions. Friend, let me tell you something. One way that you will get yourself together is by allowing yourself to be useful. Serving others is one of the healthiest things you can do for yourself. Counselors regularly tell depressed people that one of the keys to coping with depression is getting outside yourself and your own isolation and serving someone else. Serving others in children's ministry; by hosting a group, by tutoring a child in our after school program. It is a key to long-term mental health for the elderly, you have to be useful or you begin to wither and die.

We do not have to have it all together to be useful to God. If you look back at church history, some of the great saints who have most impacted this world for God had severe health or emotional problems. For example, Teresa of Avila, who was a mystic and writer in Spain back in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, suffered terribly



through years of intense migraines. She founded houses for nuns and priests throughout Spain and helped to bring a fresh wave of the Holy Spirit to the church.

Brother Lawrence, who lived in 17<sup>th</sup> century France and wrote a book called *Practicing the Presence of God* that has helped people for the last 400 years get in touch with God never got over his chronic gout.

Martin Luther, the great Reformer, died a very difficult death following a long string of debilitating illnesses.

Richard Baxter, the great Puritan writer in England, wrote some of his greatest works with a huge tumor protruding from his body.

St. Francis of Assisi, the founder of the Franciscan order back at the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, who loved and cared for the poor in his country, and who loved to view nature as a way to adore God, was nearly blind when he wrote his *Canticle of Brother Sun*. In fact, the *Canticle of Brother Sun* is supposed to be the very first work of literature in Italian. It contains the famous words:

*May Thou be praised, my Lord, with all Thy creatures, especially Mr. Brother Sun, of whom is the day and now enlightens us through him. He is beautiful and radiant with the great splendor of Thee Most High....may Thou be praised, my*

*Lord, for Sister Moon and the stars in heaven, Thou has made them clear and precious and beautiful.*

He wrote these words when he was unable to see the sun or the moon, or stars.

God spreads his kingdom through people with disabilities. God spreads his kingdom through people who are struggling emotionally. God spreads his kingdom through people who are struggling in their marriages, or with their finances. God spreads his Kingdom through retirees, the divorced, and single parents. Never allow yourself for a moment to believe that you cannot be useful to the King, if only you turn to him in trust and obedience.

What is God up to on the earth today? He is developing worshippers of King Jesus. Matthew 28:17,

#### SLIDE

Mt 28:17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.

It is really amazing that so much of contemporary American version of Christianity has de-linked worship and world missions. We have so many folks who love to worship. They listen to worship music in their cars and offices, in their kitchens and on their computers. They love to worship at church. But they virtually never think about missions at all.

On the other hand, we have many people who are into missions. They are pure activists. But they spend virtually no time in worship. During public worship at the church, they look around and almost view it as a waste of time. Let's get on with the job. Let's get on with missions. These folks never privately worship.

Why is that? We talk about whatever we think is great, whatever excites us, whatever captivates our interest, that is what we talk about. If a TV show, or a film captures your interest, you talk about that. If shoes or shopping for clothes or makeup fires you up, then you talk about shoes, makeup or clothes. Teenagers are boy crazy and girl crazy and so they talk about boys and girls. If you are a sports fan, you talk about your favorite team. All true mission is born in worship.

We first have to gain a high view, an exalted view, a vision of King Jesus – how good, pure, loving, excellent this person, Jesus Christ, is. Once we see Christ exalted in our hearts, we will want to share him with others. We'll want others to see the same thing we see.

Here is what CS Lewis, my favorite Christian author says in his book *Reflection on the Psalms*.

*I had not noticed either that just as men spontaneously praise whatever they value, so they spontaneous urge us to join us in praising it: "Isn't she lovely?"*

*Wasn't it glorious? Don't you think that magnificent?" The Psalmist in telling everyone to praise God is doing what all men do when they speak of what they care about.*

There are so many examples of this link between worship and mission, perhaps the best known is in Isaiah 6. The southern kingdom of Judah has just suffered a massive political crisis. This long-reigning, noble, beloved King Uzziah has died, and Judah was being threatened by an aggressively expanding empire called Assyria. During this crisis, Isaiah the prophet visits the temple in Jerusalem and has a vision of God.

Isaiah 6:1-3

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Isa 6:1 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple.

Isa 6:2 Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying.

Isa 6:3 And they were calling to one another:

"Holy, holy , holy is the LORD Almighty;  
the whole earth is full of his glory."

He discovers in worship in the temple that his nation and his world was not ultimately ruled by King Uzziah, who died. Isaiah discovers in the temple that worship, that his nation and his world, is ruled ultimately by God.

But notice Isaiah's vision as not a private, mystical experience to be secretly enjoyed only by Isaiah. Isaiah wasn't having his own private little charismatic experience. He wasn't just getting a little buzz in the temple. Because he discovered the greatness of the King of Kings, he desires to share his experience. So we read in Isaiah 6:8 these words:

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Isa 6:8 Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?"  
And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"

Some of you feel called to missions. Do you realize that the best preparation for missions is to become a great worshipper. Totally engage yourself in worship at our weekend celebrations, and in our small groups. Learn to be a private worshipper. Allow yourself to have huge thoughts of your huge King Jesus. It is out of worship, out of a vision of Christ's excellency and his greatness, his love and authority, his exaltation as King, that you will feel a compulsion to share this vision of Christ with others in our city, and, perhaps, around our world. The news is too good for you to keep to yourself.

And then, I quote from CS Lewis' *Reflection on the Psalms*:

*I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses, but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation. It is*

*not out of complement that lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are; the delight is incomplete until it is expressed.*

We experience great joy when we tell others about King Jesus. And what is the purpose of missions? It is not just to get some poor non-Christian saved. The goal of missions is to turn people into worshippers of King Jesus. The last stop on the train of the kingdom of God is worship. Revelation 7:9-10,

#### SLIDE

Rev 7:9 After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.

Rev 7:10 And they cried out in a loud voice:

“Salvation belongs to our God,  
who sits on the throne,  
and to the Lamb.”

So we have worship that leads to mission and mission that leads back to worship. We say: I never think about Christian missions. The only time I think about missionaries is occasionally when I hear about them at church. I read in the Bible that the apostles gave everything to share the Good News of Christ throughout the Roman Empire. But it is hard for me to even think about sacrificing money in this giving campaign to support missions or the community center. I'm not that motivated.

Friend, let me share an affectionate word with you. Don't just try to stir up feelings of compassion for the poor, or the lost in your heart. Don't only read missionary biographies, although these are very inspirational. Don't, in other words, only aim horizontally toward the world or the lost, or the poor. Start growing vertically. Start becoming a worshipper of the King and if you really get a vision of King Jesus, you will feel compelled to share that vision with others.

Matthew goes on and tells us about the King's authority in Matthew 28:18-20.

#### SLIDE

Mt 28:18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Mt 28:19 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,

Mt 28:20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

You know, these 50 words in Greek have had more importance in the history of the church and in missions than almost any other words ever spoken. 50 words in Greek. The key word in this text is "all." There are at least five "all's" in the text. In v. 18: Jesus claims all authority.

#### SLIDE – v. 18

Mt 28:18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

And the disciples in verse 19 are commissioned to make disciples of all nations.

SLIDE – v. 19

Mt 28:19 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,

And those who turn to God in faith and repentance are to be baptized into all of God.

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baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

And converts are taught to obey all that Jesus commanded.

SLIDE

Mt 28:20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Jesus promises his presence with the disciples all of every day. All, All, All – all encompassing authority of the King. All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Jesus is deliberately connecting himself to a prophecy that the prophet Daniel had five centuries before in Daniel 7:13-14,

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Da 7:13 “In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence.



Da 7:14 He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

Jesus is the heavenly Son of Man from Daniel 7, who has been given authority and sovereign power.

What in the world is God up to? Spreading the authority of Jesus Christ over every man, woman, and child on the face of the earth. It is interesting that Satan offered Jesus authority over the kingdoms of the world, if Jesus would simply bow the knee to Satan. But Jesus refused Satan's offer. Jesus chose God's way, God's direction for his life, a direction that included opposition and rejection, misunderstanding and suffering, and death. And because Jesus trusted God's plan for his life, God gave him more than Satan ever could. Jesus became ruler over heaven and earth.

Jesus refused the offer that many of us accept every day. We bow the knee to Satan for so much less than Jesus was offered.

- Yes, Satan, I will opt for my immediate happiness by getting out of this marriage that makes me so unhappy, even though I know that this is against God's will for my life.
- Yes, Satan, I will opt for career advancement, even if it involves lying on my resume, or lying to a customer or client.
- Yes, Satan, I will bow to the pressure of my sexual appetites.

- Yes, Satan, I will cave into my fears and insecurities; my feelings of inadequacy, the pressure of the fear of man in my life, my fear of my parents, my fear of others, so that I will not obey God's call on me right now.

Friend, do you believe that if you follow the example of King Jesus, that God will give you more through trust and obedience, even if it involves suffering, than you could ever get through disobedience and Satan's attractive alternative. Satan is always handing out an attractive alternative to you.

To believe that God will give you so much more than Satan would offer you requires you to see God as completely good and willing to be good to you. God always intends your best. You have to see God as completely competent, able to be good to you and able to deliver to you his best. God will always, always hold up your end. Maybe not in the short-run. Maybe in the short-run you may lose someone's approval. You may lose someone's acceptance. You may suffer.

But I tell you the truth, in the long-run, God will always hold up your end. All sin, all disobedience ultimately comes from your failure and my failure to believe the gospel. The gospel tells us that God is completely gracious and has shown us his grace in sending Christ into the world to offer us unearned favor. All the unmerited acceptance and love we could ever need or want comes to us through

the gospel of King Jesus. When we sin, we are turning our backs on the gospel. We are saying there is something more that I need – money, sex, power, or control. There is something more that I need than what God freely provides for me through the gospel. And so we forfeit the grace that could be ours.

“All authority on heaven and earth has been given to me.” The claim of Jesus here is offensive to our contemporary world. Jesus’ claim seems arrogant. It seems threatening and aggressive. When we Christians say all authority is vested in one person, Jesus, and that God is going about bringing people under the authority of Jesus our Lord, the contemporary West says: You claim your God is superior to other gods? That is so intolerant, presumptuous, narrow, exclusivist, and hateful.

Understand that for many people in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the overriding concern is how we can all get along and live in peace in a world that is so diverse. The idea that has been promoted into an absolute, especially in Europe, but also here in more progressive American cities and on most university campuses is that the only way we can all get along coming as we do from so many diverse backgrounds, is if we reject the notion that any belief is truer than any other belief. Only if we adopt relativism and include everyone under our big tent of community, only if we say: “You know, all beliefs are basically equal,” can we have any peace.

There was a shattering event for young people in the Netherlands just a few months ago. Maybe some of you read about it. Theo van Gogh, who was the grandson of the brother of the painter Vincent van Gogh, was shot and stabbed to death in Amsterdam this past November. He had recently done a film titled “Submission” with a Somali woman, who had fled an arranged marriage and ended up in the Netherlands. But Theo van Gogh and this woman did a 10-minute film depicting the stories of four women, who while saying their Muslim prayers described to God the sexual and physical abuse they suffered at the hands of the men in their lives. The actresses have Koranic verses painted on their backs. They even have what looks like lashes painted on their bodies.

Van Gogh received a number of death threats over this film. Finally, a Muslim man shot him several times and then crossed the street and stabbed him many times in the chest leaving a note pinned to Theo van Gogh’s chest with a knife. The note had some verses from the Koran on it. It sent shock waves through Europe, especially through young people because it has forced Europeans to confront the question: Can everyone really be included in our community? Can we include Muslim extremists in our community? Can we include people who reject our notions of freedom of speech in our community? At some point, Europeans are discovering that every community has boundaries and every community excludes.

The same thing is true in our country, friends. Take any group that urges inclusiveness in our society. For example, let's consider gays. Even the gay community has boundaries that exclude people. If a person is, for example, on the executive board of Stonewall Union, the gay and lesbian political action group, and that person stood up in a meeting and said, "You know, I've had a religious experience and I'm no longer gay." Imagine that this person wouldn't shut up, but showed up at every meeting and said: "I've had this wonderful religious experience and I'm no longer gay." Do you think they could continue to serve on the executive board of Stonewall Union? At some point, the rest of the board would say: Look, we exist to promote gay rights and you are violating the very reason we exist. You need to get out.

Excluding someone because of their beliefs or behavior is a feature of every single human community – whether we are talking about gays, postmoderns, feminists, Republicans, Jews, Hindus, or Muslims. Every community has boundaries and borders. Every community has to exclude someone, otherwise you aren't a community. The issue is not whether you exclude, whether you have boundaries, whether you have borders. The issue is what you do with people at the borders. What do you do with people who oppose your cause, who are enemies of your cause?

I wrote a book about this titled *Who Is My Enemy? Welcoming People the Church Rejects*. What do we do with people at the borders of our community?

And here is where true Christians are totally different than every other community. See, we Christians, if we are true to our Lord, we will treat people at the borders better than they treat us when we are at their borders. I emphasize the “if we are true to our Lord” part. Because throughout Christian history, we Christians have betrayed our Lord. And we treat our enemies the way they treat us. Just listen to some radio and TV preachers. Just pick up Christian literature that may come in the mail from Christian political action groups. Much of it betrays our King.

How did Jesus, the one who makes these outrageous claims to have all authority in heaven and on earth, treat his enemies? He died for his enemies.

You see, everyone else chases away people at the boundaries of their group. Everyone else screams at the borders: Get lost. Get away. We hate you. You aren't one of us. Everyone else engages in name calling and stigmatizing. We're going to kill you. Some groups actually do kill – they put a knife in your chest with a note on it. They will ruin you. Everyone else rejects and shows disdain for people at their borders. Everyone else shows fear and contempt for those with whom they disagree.

What does Jesus do? He dies for people at the borders. He dies for the religious who think God owes them something. And he dies for the non-religious, who

never think of God at all. He dies for God fearers and he dies for God haters. He dies for heterosexual sinners and he dies for homosexual sinners. Jesus dies for right wing, bigoted Republicans and he dies for left-wing Democrats.

Don't ever be intimidated when someone comes along and charges you as a Christian that you are an exclusivist, or that you are claiming the superiority of your view because you say: I follow someone who is absolutely unique – Jesus has all authority in heaven and earth. Every community excludes. Every community is narrow. But only one community leader, Jesus Christ our King, died for the excluded and for those who hate him.

And so, our style of missions, our style of spreading the kingdom of our Lord, ought to be like our King's style. Our style should never be vindictive or retaliatory.

- Let's treat them the way they treat us.
- We're not welcome at their meetings, let's not welcome them.
- They put us down, let's kill them

The style of the kingdom of God ought to be one of friendship and servanthood, openness and dialogue. We never use the language of contempt.

This community center that we are planning to build demands a different approach to our city than Christians typically take. We are not at war with the city

of Columbus. We are not at war with the school system. We are not at war with the Mayor. We are not at war with corporations in our city. We are not at war with our schools. Someone else may hate us. Someone else may malign us. Someone may reject our views. They may say false things about us. We are called to be true to our Lord who died for his enemies.

And the issue, friend, is not whether Jesus' claims boggle the mind, or whether they are exclusive. The only issue is whether Jesus' claim is true. Was Jesus truly given all authority in heaven and on earth, or not?

The philosopher, Mortimer Adler, in his book *Truth in Religion* said we always have to distinguish between matters of taste from matters of truth. If I say the Flying Pizza down by OSU makes the best pizza in Columbus, or Ford makes the worst mini-van and the 1996 Windstar that I bought was a piece of junk, or the Simpsons is the funniest show on TV, these are all matters of taste. They are all opinions or preferences. But if I say George Bush is the president of the United States, or OSU is a member of the Big Ten Conference, or Washington DC is the capitol of the US, Adler would call these matters of truth. These statements describe realities that exist independent of my perceptions.

So the question of a religious claim is this: is the religious claim an opinion, a preference, a matter of taste, or is the religious claim a matter of truth?



What do you think, friend, if I say there was a man named Jesus of Nazareth, who lived in Palestine in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. Is that a matter of taste or a matter of truth.

Likewise, if I say that Jesus was executed on a cross around 27 AD is that taste or truth?

Similarly, if I say Jesus rose from the dead after three days, and appeared to many witnesses. This is not a matter of taste, this is a matter of truth.

No amount of evidence will ever prove a matter of taste. But evidence can verify or falsify a matter of truth. If you are interested in finding out whether the claims made about Jesus are true or not, I would command to your attention two really good books. We have them at our bookstore. One is Lee Strobel's *The Case for Christ*. And the second is Ravi Zacharias' *Jesus Among Other Gods*.

Friend, understand that when Jesus says all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me, he is not simply offering us a set of beliefs that will meet our psychological needs for faith in a higher power. He is not simply offering to meet people's social needs, or their needs for community. Jesus is making the claim that is either true or false. And it makes all the difference in the world whether he has authority or he doesn't.

Let me put it this way. Some people say that it doesn't matter what you believe. Some people say that religion exists to meet people's spiritual and emotional needs, and their social needs for community. All religions do this. So all religions are equally valid. But religion does more than meet our spiritual or emotional needs. All religions make truth claims about the nature of reality. All religions diagnose what is wrong with people and what the solution is for what's wrong with people.

Let me put it this way. Let's say you begin to have crippling headaches. You've never had them before, but now you have them every day. They are absolutely debilitating. You don't know why you have them, so you visit an allergist. She tells you that you are allergic to dyes in luncheon meat and strong perfume. You need to stop eating artificial dyes and you need to be away from people wearing strong perfume. But your therapist says: No, the problem is not allergies. The problem is your anxiety. You internalize all your problems. The tension you are suppressing is causing your headaches. Your chiropractor takes x-rays and says your back is misaligned and that you need to have your neck and back adjusted. Your dentist says it is definitely TMJ and sends you to a specialist. Your physical therapist says that your problem is muscular. You need to do different stretching exercises. Finally, you go to a neurologist who takes an MRI and discovers that you have a brain tumor.

Now, because your friends are good 21<sup>st</sup> century Americans, they say: It really doesn't matter whose opinion you believe. The health profession exists to help people get well. All doctors' diagnoses and all treatment plans are equally valid. No one can claim to have a superior diagnosis, or a superior solution to a health problem. They are all the same.

But the diagnoses and solutions are not equal. In fact, finding out the truth about your health can literally be a matter of life and death. If you really have a brain tumor, doing exercises or getting your teeth worked on won't heal it. And finding out what the truth is about your spiritual condition, what's really wrong with you, what is really wrong with your marriage, what is really wrong inside of you, finding out the truth and going to the one person who can solve your problem is a matter of life and death. It is a matter of heaven and hell. Spending eternity with God or without God.

Jesus claims he has the answer for what's wrong with the world. Do you believe him? Do you believe that Jesus has the answer for you? If you do, then you will go to him to heal you, to heal your marriage, to heal your past?

The reason the Vineyard is trying to expand our involvement in world missions through this giving campaign is that we have a deep conviction that Jesus Christ is the only one who has the authority to speak to the spiritual sickness of every human being who has ever lived. Jesus can address the problems of Iraqis and

Pakistanis, Africans, Japanese, people in France, Egypt, and Brazil and the US. He can address the problem. The problem is sin and he has addressed it by dying on a cross and rising from the dead.

How does the kingdom of God spread? The King selects broken people – people with problems, people with physical, emotional, and relational problems and he says to problem people like us:

#### SLIDE

Mt 28:19 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,

The reason we are involved in this giving campaign is out of obedience to this command in Matthew 28:19,

#### SLIDE

Mt 28:19 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,  
We are to go out to our neighborhoods and we're to go out to the whole world.

This year we have 13 short-term missions trips planned. We are doing outreaches to Beninin West Africa. We've got a couple of trips going to Brazil and China. We have trips going to Costa Rica, Indonesia, Mexico, Morocco, and to Ontario, Canada to work with Native Americans. We have trips going to Tanzania and Zambia.

There is a member of our congregation, Will Shearer, who is an attorney here in our city, who was raised in a Presbyterian church, came under the authority of Jesus Christ as an adult, and last year participated in one of our short-term missions trip.

FILM – Will Shearer

I want to encourage you this year instead of taking your vacation, or as part of your vacation, consider going on a short-term mission trip. Personally fulfill the command of Jesus to go. You may have always thought about going. If you feel a stirring from the Holy Spirit, then go. Hear the Word of the Lord and go. Stop making excuses, just go.

We have more information about the trips. There is a table in the lobby with information about each of these trips. Or you can contact Sara Nauman at the church office for more information.

Do you know, we don't have to go far to be involved in world missions. The world is moving to American urban areas. There are 78 languages spoken in Columbus Public Schools. The number one foreign language in Columbus Public Schools is Somali. Number 2 is Spanish. Do you know what number 3 is? Khmer, the Cambodian language. Number 4 is Laotian.

- There are nearly a hundred thousand foreign-born citizens in Franklin County alone.
- The Somali Community Association estimate 27,000 Somalis live in Franklin County.
- Nearly 90,000 people in Franklin County speak a language at home other than English.
- 27,000 speak Spanish at home.
- 2500 speak Russian
- 7000 speak Chinese
- 10,000 households in our community are considered linguistically isolated – no one over 14 speaks English very well.
- There are 130 countries represented by OSU students

The world is coming here.

And when we go to our community through the community center, when we go in short term missions, when we raise up teams that go, what are we supposed to do? What in the world is God up to?

God is up to using his disciples, broken as we are, flawed as we are, to make other disciples. A disciple is a student, a learner, an apprentice. To make disciples is to enroll people in the school of Jesus. To make disciples is to go out

into the world and create life-long learners, life-long apprentices of Jesus. And note that we make disciples of Jesus. Our goal is to bind people to King Jesus. Unlike the Jewish rabbis of Jesus' day, or the Greek philosophers of an earlier time, we don't bind people to ourselves. Christians are not supposed to make clones of us and bind people to our authority. That is what cults do. Christians go pointing people to Christ. He is the King. We're not. We are bringing people under his lordship, not ours.

What is the curriculum in the school of Jesus? The curriculum is everything Jesus commanded of his original followers. Matthew 28:20,

#### SLIDE

Mt 28:20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

The university of Jesus means that you have to take a course and master everything that Jesus taught and modeled – everything. Many of us want to skip certain classes. We want to major in one thing. If you ask the average American Christian: "What classes are you enrolled in in the school of Jesus?" I'm enrolled in the class on how to get God's blessing on my life, regardless of how I live or whether I obey. We are enrolled in the class of how to get your prayers answered every time. We don't want to take classes in the necessity of denying ourselves, or the requirement to learn how to serve and see ourselves as servants in the church. We don't want to take the prerequisite of suffering before we inherit the kingdom of God, or the requirement of learning contentment in all

circumstances, even when our marriage is unhappy, our finances are failing, or ministry opportunities don't open up.

But before a Christian graduates from the school of Jesus, they must pass exams in every single area Jesus taught and modeled, everything.

**SLIDE**

Mt 28:20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Everything includes learning how to pray for the sick.

Everything includes learning how to cast out demons.

Everything includes learning how to sacrificially give money to the poor.

Everything includes going when God calls you to go and serving when God calls you to serve.

Everything includes becoming a peacemaker.

Everything includes humility

...and meekness

...and purity of heart

...and loving our enemies

...and rejoicing when we suffer for righteousness sake

...and trusting God when we are not totally in control of our future.



Do you know that in the school of Jesus, you don't get to pick most of your classes. Some classes you get to sign up for. But most of the classes, Jesus picks for you. You just suddenly find yourself enrolled in the class of frustration and you are going to spend a year in the class of being unjustly attacked, or three months of being laid up in bed. You show up on the first day for the blessing class, and you discover the room has been moved and you are in the room learning how to patiently wait for God to move when you've prayed about something hundreds of times.

It is people who are learning and growing in the school of Jesus that will spread the kingdom of God. We go out into the world to enroll people in the Jesus' university. Communicating everything that he commanded of us.

How are we going to make disciples of nations and place them into the community of God's people, which is what baptism is all about? V. 20

#### SLIDE

Mt 28:20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

The disciple-making role is not something that we do independently of God. We have discovered what God is up to in the world today. God is up to spreading the kingdom of his Son Jesus Christ. God is up to enrolling people in the school of Jesus Christ. He sends us out to sign people up for Jesus' school. He sends

people out to model for the world a different way of treating people at the borders. We are signposts for the kingdom of God. We are agents for the kingdom of God. We are ambassadors of King Jesus.

We can't do this job alone. Only if Jesus' promise is true, that he will go with us, then can we hope to make followers of him.

Let me close with this thought. I talk with people all the time who say: "You know, I experience very little of God's presence in my life. People talk about spiritual experiences, I've had very few." Maybe some of you are in that situation. Friend, I believe that most experiences of God occur when you are involved in God's business. Where do we encounter the kingdom of God? At the borders of the kingdom, as the kingdom expands, as another person transfers ownership of their life from themselves to Christ – there is the kingdom.

- When you serve in children's ministry teaching children to become students of Christ, there is the kingdom of God.
- When you are out there giving a bag of groceries to someone who is hungry, there is the kingdom and you experience King Jesus.
- When you pray for the sick and Jesus is mending a body, there is the kingdom of God.
- When you volunteer your medical skills as a doctor, a nurse, a dentist or optometrist at our free medical clinic, there is the kingdom of God.

- When you give counsel to someone whose marriage is struggling and they embrace that counsel, there is the kingdom of God.
- When you go on a short-term mission trip, there is the kingdom of God.
- When you pray about what you are to give to the community center and to missions, and you obey what God tells you, there is the kingdom of God.

You won't experience the presence of the King when you are out doing your own thing. When you do his thing, and when we as a church are about the King's business, then we will experience the King's presence. Let's pray.

## **What In The World Is God Up To?**

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**Rich Nathan**

**January 22-23, 2005**

**Blessed to be a Blessing Series**

**Matthew 28:16-20**

I. The King And His Worshippers (Mt. 28:17; Is. 6:1-8)

A. Not Supermen

B. Worship And Missions

II. The King And His Authority (Mt. 28:18)

A. The King And His Faith

B. The King And His Enemies

C. The King And His Salvation

III. The King And His Methods

A. The King And His World (Mt. 28:19a)

B. The King And His School (Mt. 28:19a)

C. The King And His Community (Mt. 28:19b)

D. The King And His Presence (Mt. 28:20)