

What in the World Are We Doing?

Matthew 28: 16-20

05/18/08

Have you heard the story about the young police officer that was on the witness stand testifying in the trial of a man he had arrested for robbery? A hard-nosed attorney who was known far and wide for being tough on police officers was representing the defendant.

In cross-examination, the tough lawyer was trying to undermine the policeman's credibility and the exchange between the fiery lawyer and the young policemen went like this.

The lawyer speaks first.

"Officer... did you see (with your own eyes) my client committing this crime?"

"No, Sir... I didn't see him but my partner did".

"Well, if you didn't see him commit the crime... why did you arrest him?"

"Because, my partner went in the front of the store and I came in the back. My partner saw him taking money out of the safe... and when the defendant tried to run away, my partner pointed and shouted 'There he goes!' ... I chased him, tackled him and arrested him."

"And, you trust your partner that much? You would just act on his word?"

"Yes Sir, I would trust him... and all my fellow officers with my life."

At this point, the tough lawyer smiled because he thought he knew now just how to trip up the young policeman. He said: **"With your life? Well then, let me ask you this, officer. Do you have a room at the station where you change your clothes in preparation for your daily duties?"**

"Yes Sir, we do."

"And, do you have a locker in that room?"

"Yes Sir, I do."

And do you have a lock on that locker?"

"Yes Sir."

"Do you lock your locker every day?"

"Yes Sir."

"Now, why is it, officer... if you trust your fellow officers with your life that you find it necessary to lock your locker in a room you share with these same officers?"

Again, the tough lawyer smiled smugly because he felt he had trapped the young policemen... but the young officer rose to the occasion... and gave the perfect answer.

He said: **"You see, sir, we share this building with the court complex and sometimes lawyers walk through that room!"**

The courtroom erupted in laughter and a prompt recess was called. And it is said that the young police officer has been nominated for **"the come-back of the year award"**.

Well, when we read the scriptures closely, we find ourselves wanting to nominate the early disciples of Jesus for "the comeback of history award". Just think of it.

When Jesus was arrested, they got scared and ran away. When Jesus was crucified, they were down for the count... devastated, disillusioned, and defeated. They had not counted on this at all... and they didn't know what on earth to do. **"What in the world do we do now?"**

That was their question... and they simply did not know how to answer that. Then their hope was rekindled. Their direction was clarified. Their dream was still alive... because their Lord was still alive! Jesus Christ came out of the tomb. He rose from the dead and the Risen Christ appeared to them numerous times.

One of those Resurrection Appearances is found here in our text for today, Matthew 28. He met them back where it all started... in Galilee... and He gave them what we now call The Great Commission. He said:

"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... to the close of the age."

The disciples knew then what they were supposed to do in the world... and a short time later, the Holy Spirit came and gave them the strength and courage and power to do it.

With the right answer in their minds and the Holy Spirit in their hearts... they went out and turned

the world upside down (or better put) right side up.

Now, let me ask you something. If a new Christian came to you today and said: "I have just become a Christian. I have accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. What in the world am I supposed to do?" How would you answer that question?

It's a key question because it impacts everything we do as individual Christians and as a Church family. Over the years and to the present moment, people have answered this question in three very different ways. Let's look at these three options and see where we fit in.

I. SOME SAY: "REJECT THE WORLD!"

The idea here is that the world is evil with all its temptations and enticements and pressures... and the body is weak, so according to this view the only hope is to flee, to forsake the world, to reject it.

There are many dramatic illustrations of this in history.

Those religious groups who constantly emphasize "the second coming"... to the neglect of everything else. All that matters they say, is "to be saved from this world".

Here in America, for example in the 1800's, a religious leader from Vermont named **William Miller** announced that Christ would return to earth in 1843. Some of his followers got carried away and announced the exact day and time.

As that moment approached, the tension mounted. Farmers stopped farming. Children dropped out of school. Merchants gave away their goods because soon there would be no need for them. Fear of the last judgment caused some to commit suicide.

One man put on a white robe and climbed a tree on the appointed day. When the precise predicted moment came, he jumped out of the tree and tried to fly into the arms of Christ... and he fell to his death. The night passed, the next day, the next night. Some couldn't stand the strain and took their own lives. Others were led away insane. Heart-broken, the Millerites returned to their homes they had neglected... and to crops that had remained unharvested.

A sweeter illustration of this "**Reject the World**" approach is seen in the Amish People. Please don't misunderstand me. I love the Amish people. I am not being critical of them... They are

wonderful people from who we could learn much, but the basic premise of their life-style is world-rejection.

They reject the modern world. They do not use automobiles or electricity. They use hooks and eyes on their clothes instead of buttons or zippers. And, they worship in private homes.

They keep to themselves to protect their way of life... and to avoid the temptations of our modern times. Sweetly, but dramatically... they reject the world.

We also see this world-rejection idea on a personal level. Some people cannot handle the stresses and demands and problems and suffering of the world... so they become neurotic or paranoid, others withdraw to live hermit-like existences.

There is a problem with this reject the world approach. It is not the Biblical answer. It is not God's answer. When God created the world, He looked upon it and said, "**It is good**". Later, "**He so loved the world that He gave His only Son to save the world.**" This brings us to the second answer

II. OTHERS SAY: RESEMBLE THE WORLD.

"Identify with the world"... "Blend In"... "Go along to get along"... "Don't Rock the Boat ... they say." "Just accommodate yourself to the standards of the world. Don't stir the waters; just go with the flow."

Bishop Arthur Moore once told about a college student who became a Christian and joined the church in the spring of the year. Shortly after, he went up north to work in a logging camp for the summer. His friends at church were worried about him, this new Christian being exposed to the tough life of the logging camp. They were afraid the rough, worldly, lumberjacks might tease him harshly or even persecute him, because of his faith... or tempt him to short-cut his best self. His church friends prayed for him daily.

When the summer ended and he returned home, his friends at church quizzed him:

"Did you make it all right?" ... "Was it difficult?" ... "Did the lumberjacks give you a hard time because of your faith?"

He answered: "I made it just fine. No problems at all. I handled it well. They never found out that I'm a Christian!"

Let me ask you something:

Can people tell that you are a Christian? Or, do you just blend in?

Yes, some say the Christian is to relate to the world by RESEMBLING IT. There is a problem with this approach. It is not the Biblical answer... It is not God's answer... The scriptures tell us to not conform to the world, but rather to be The LIGHT of the world. The SALT of the earth. The LEAVEN in the loaf. This brings us to the third answer.

III. STILL OTHERS SAY: REDEEM THE WORLD.

Change it! Improve it! Make a difference! Make the world a better place! Redeem it!

Let me hurry to say that there are some situations that we can't redeem by ourselves. We need an outside source of strength to come and help us, to come and save us. This is what Jesus Christ is all about.

Christ comes as an outside source of strength to redeem us... to deliver us... to save us... to give us a new life and another chance... and to give us a job! He puts us to work as His missionaries. He sends us out to be ministers of redemption for a needy, broken world. He sends us out to make disciples of all nations, to continue His ministry, His caring, His loving, His healing redemptive touch.

Where there is a problem with God's help, we can solve it. Where there is a wrong, with God's help, we can right it. Where there are hungry people, with God's help, we can feed them. This is our task, our calling, and our great commission. This is what we do!

Some years ago, Ed Beck, an All-American basketball player, took a group of athletes on a mission work trip to Korea. After their project was completed, they were saying good-bye to the Korean villagers. It was a touching moment. A little Korean girl brought flowers to Ed Beck and the other athletes representing her village she said: "These flowers will fade and die but you will smell here forever!"

Well, I hope we "smell forever" – in Coldspring – in Texas – in Belize and Costa Rico – in Russia - in Africa and all over the world. My hope and prayer is that we will share the fragrance of Christ everywhere because our job – is not to reject the world – or resemble the world. Our job (with the help of

God) is to redeem the world.

How are you doing this right now by the way you live?

Pastor Larry Smith

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