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*Missions Conference 2004 – Week One*

## **Proclaiming His Name to the Nations**

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Think with me for just a minute about a defining moment in your life, a moment that really mattered. This is one of those moments you will simply never forget. It is the time, the place, the circumstances and events that have forever marked and shaped the person you are – the person you will always be. Maybe for you it was the moment you met her or him and that relationship began. Maybe it was the moment that you welcomed the birth of a child. Maybe it was the moment you got the job or the promotion. There are moments that forever matter. Today, I would like to suggest that there is a moment that matters more than any other.

If you have a Bible, turn with me to Luke 24. In chapter 24, we find Luke's account of the events occurring on Jesus' resurrection day. The chapter begins with the women mourning and coming to the tomb to anoint the dead body of Jesus but the story quickly changes as they find the tomb empty. Two angels appear to them and ask, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here; He has risen." The women, in astonishment, return and tell the disciples. Peter runs to investigate.

Meanwhile, in verse 13, the scene takes another turn, and we find two disciples walking along the road to Emmaus and a stranger appears and begins to walk with them. This is Jesus, but they don't understand that. For some reason they cannot recognize that it is Jesus. He begins to ask them questions about why they are upset and what is happening. They say, "Are you the only one who does not know what has happened in Jerusalem?" He says, "Well what?" and they tell Him about Jesus and about how He has been crucified. Then they tell Him how they are really astonished because now some of the women have said that they have seen Jesus alive. They are really confused.

This encounter with the disciples and the stranger on the road to Emmaus is an important passage. In it we get a glimpse of the confused and discouraged mindset of the disciples following the crucifixion of Christ. We also get a picture of a little bit of what the source of their confusion is all about.

In verse 20, we find that they are telling this stranger (who is actually Jesus) that the chief priests and the rulers, who delivered Jesus to a sentence of death, crucified Him. Then in verse 21, they were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. It is important to understand their mindset. In spite of the fact that the Scriptures had repeatedly foretold of Messiah's suffering, and in spite of the fact that Jesus Himself had repeatedly foretold of His coming death, the disciples were still living a fantasy. They, like nearly all of the Jewish people of their day, were awaiting a Messiah. But the Messiah they were waiting for was, in their minds, a Messiah that would be a conquering king, not a suffering Savior. Even though the Scriptures clearly taught of Messiah's suffering, even though Jesus Himself had repeatedly declared the things to come, they did not get it. They did not see it, because they focused instead on what appealed to them.

You see, they were oppressed by the heavy hand of the Roman Empire, and they were convinced that God was going to send a redeemer – a deliverer who would set them free from the political and physical oppression. But as is so often the case, God had an even greater plan to redeem them from their spiritual bondage and their eternal condemnation.

Nonetheless, in Luke 24 the disciples are sad; they are discouraged and they are also a little befuddled by these crazy resurrection accounts. Jesus listens to their hearts. Then He captures this critical teachable moment to reveal God's greater purpose and plan. Look with me at verse 25 and following.

**And He said to them, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.** (vs. 25-27, \*NASB)

Now, think about what an amazing lesson that must have been as Jesus takes them back to the beginning. He connects the dots for these confused, yet seeking, disciples. We need to see something critical about what He shared. Jesus took them through the Law. He took them through the prophets, and He showed them through those Old Testament Scriptures everything about what? About Himself. Notice the word in verse 27, "He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures."

Friends, the entire Bible is the story of God's redemptive plan from the fall of man in Genesis to the new heaven and earth in Revelation. It is all about a single common theme. The common character in it all is the person of Jesus Christ, foreshadowed in the Old Testament and revealed in the gospels. He was proclaimed in Acts and explained in the letters. He is exalted in Revelation. From beginning to end, it is all about Jesus. For the first time, these disciples begin to truly understand.

They arrive at Emmaus and they urge Jesus to stay with them. He comes in, and they sit down. They begin to have a meal. As they break bread, suddenly Jesus somehow allows them to see who He really is. Their eyes are opened and they recognize it is the Lord. Then He vanishes.

**They said to one another, "Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?"** (v. 32)

They get up and they head right back to Jerusalem to tell this exciting news to the other disciples. As they arrive, the other disciples are talking about Jesus appearing to Peter, and they share about this account. Suddenly, Jesus appears right in their midst. They think maybe it is a ghost. To reassure them He says, "No, touch my hands. Look at Me. I am not a ghost. I have flesh and bones." They still are not sure this is real because of their joy and amazement. He says, "I will have something to eat," and He eats right before them. He reassures them, "It is really Me. I am God, and I am man." In that moment, Jesus again has the opportunity to teach them.

**Now He said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.** (vs. 44-45)

Once again, He does the same thing. Teaching from the Law, from the Prophets and from the Psalms – throughout the Scripture – the message is about Him. He showed them all things

which were written about Him. And then He showed them how both the crucifixion and the resurrection were a part of the perfect, preordained plan of God.

**And He said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”** (vs. 46-49)

Jesus revealed to them what the plan of God was from the past. Then He revealed the plan of God for the future. They would receive the coming of the promised Holy Spirit to direct and empower them. And then they – and we – would go forward to proclaim His name to the nations. They – and we – would serve as witnesses of the glory of God and the wonder of His graciousness and His redemptive plan for all peoples in all places to the ends of the earth until the end of time. That is what Jesus said, and then He left.

**And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. While He was blessing them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they, after worshiping Him, returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple praising God.** (vs. 50-53)

Earlier I mentioned that the Jews were excited about a conquering king, but they failed to focus on the biblical necessity of a suffering Savior. Tunnel vision is a typical human condition. Often, we focus on what we want to see rather than seeing the full picture. It is the reason that the vast majority of people in America say they believe in God, and yet they pay absolutely no attention to the precepts of God’s Word. In a similar way, you and I can be absolutely committed to the word of God and yet get out of balance in how we live our lives as believers. All of us naturally want to focus on the wonders of all that God has done *for us*. But sometimes we fail to keep front and center the amazing thing God wants to do *through us*. The truth of Scripture from beginning to end is that God is on a redemptive mission. He is drawing people to Himself all around us and all around the world. Yet He has clearly said that the primary tools for revealing His glory to other people are the lives and the lips of His people.

In verse 47 it says that repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in His name to all nations. And in verse 48 it says, “You are witnesses of these things.”

Acts 4:12 reminds us that salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name given under heaven by which men must be saved. Never in all of history has there been a more important name than the name of Jesus. Bush, Clinton, Reagan, Kennedy, Roosevelt, Churchill, Hitler, Lincoln, Washington, Bonaparte, Nero, Buddha, Mohammed, Krishna, David, Abraham. History is replete with the names of individuals of great significance. Yet today, you and I can visit the burial place of every single one except One. Show me the tomb of Jesus Christ. It is history’s only empty tomb, for He was and is the God-Man. He came to live and die as a suffering Savior that He might pay the penalty for the sins of people from every tribe and every tongue. But He rose again to conquer death. He ascended as a risen Lord, and He will return again as a conquering King. Genesis to Revelation is the story of God’s redemptive plan for man, and at the center of it all, is one Name: Jesus the Christ, Jesu Christo, Isa Almassiihu. No matter how it is written, no matter how it is pronounced, no

matter what place, what tribe or what tongue, the truth is still the same. Only Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but through Him.

Experiencing His great love as His adopted children is our wonderful privilege. Proclaiming His name to the nations as His joyful witnesses is our world-changing opportunity. The greatest defining moment in the history of man took place in a tomb near Jerusalem when God fulfilled His redemptive plan through the death, the burial and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Today, there is no more significant defining moment in any person's life than when God reveals His redemptive plan through us. He opens a heart and mind for the first time to understand the Scriptures and to receive the Savior.

I will always cherish the beauty and the joy of my wedding day. I will forever marvel at the wonder of watching my Josh, Caleb, Dave and Dan each come forth into the world. I thank God for significant defining moments and steps all along the path of my life. But it was the day, the evening, it was the moment at an FCA meeting in the south stadium down on campus when someone first shared the gospel with me. God opened my heart and my mind to His redemptive plan and to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. It was that moment that was my life's most important defining moment.

At the beginning of the message, I showed you clips from a video. There was face upon face upon face upon face upon face upon face – millions upon millions of people in tribes and tongues all over the earth who have yet to have the privilege of that defining moment. Friends, proclaiming His name is the mission of the church. The extent or the scope of that mission is not just local, it is global – to the nations. That is why we as a church family are not just involved in seeking to expand the outreach here in this location. We are also seeking to plant a church in north Lincoln. We are also seeking to raise up leaders to be a resource to ministries throughout our region. It is also the reason why we are involved in specific, intentional mission endeavors in 32 countries on five continents all over the planet. That is the mission of the church. Each year, we set aside two weeks to give us all a glimpse of the exciting ways God is using us together to proclaim His name to the nations. We believe and trust that God will use these two weeks to encourage and challenge each of us as we consider His call and as we hear stories of His glory.