

November 13/14, 2004

Missions Conference 2004 – Week Two

Proclaiming His Name to the Nations

Dr. Rick Stitcher

Since I announced a year ago to my practice and my patients that I was leaving, I've had so many people come up to me and they've always asked the question, "Why are you going?" Of course, there is always an unspoken part on the end of that that's like, *You idiot!* But I'm convinced that the call to missions that's present throughout our church is a very personal call, first and foremost, and then it causes us to live lives differently in community.

If you have a Bible, please open to John chapter 20 this morning, and we're going to start in verse 27. There is a decision and a commitment that I made ten years ago that really explains and answers that question of why we are going. It's a question and a commitment that Patty and I have had to make; all who call on Jesus as Lord have also made that same commitment and decision.

Let me just set the stage a little bit for you. At this point, Jesus has been crucified; He was buried; He has been resurrected. He already had appeared to the disciples and those that He loved in the Upper Room a week prior. And at that time, there was one disciple missing: Thomas. As we begin looking at verse 27, the second time that these people have gathered, Jesus appears to them again. But this time Thomas is with them.

Then He [*Jesus*] said to Thomas, "Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing." Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed." (John 20:27-29, *NASB)

Ten years ago I came to a point in my life where I had achieved everything that I had been told would make me happy, content, satisfied. I had never had so much in my life...and had so little. I knew that what I had done was counting for nothing.

And I also, then, had an encounter with the risen Lord. I didn't see Him; I couldn't touch His hands or touch my hand to His side. But I knew, as I prayed to God to reveal Himself to me, that Jesus came to me and told me, "Be not unbelieving, but believe." That was a decision that I made, and I said, "Jesus, You are my Lord and my God." Those are words that are not said just easily. "Lord" is the word *Yahweh*, which is the personal name of God. It means, *You are my Lord, my owner, my master*. My life was no longer my own. "God" is the name *Elohim*, which is the general name for God which means *the One who puts forth power, the one true God*.

Ten years ago I made a decision that my life was no longer my own. Every one of you who has chosen Jesus as your Lord and God has also made that decision. That was a decision that forever changed my life.

But there's a second part of this. That's the commitment. If you go back to verse 21 in that same chapter (the first time that Jesus appeared to the disciples as they had gathered together), Jesus gives them a commissioning at that time. You see, the commissioning that Patty and I

are going to receive in just a few minutes is not our first commissioning. Each of us who has chosen Jesus as Lord has already been commissioned.

So Jesus [speaking to the assembled disciples at that time] said to them again, “Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.” And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained.” (John 20:21-23)

You see, our commissioning came from Jesus Himself. He tells us that our purpose in life, when He is our Lord and He is our God, is to go out and tell people about Him. Our purpose is not to be living for the things that so easily entangle us and consume our time in this life. We should be about the eternal purpose of telling people of the finished work of Jesus. He has attained forgiveness of sins. He has given eternal hope and security. What a tremendous purpose we have!

This has been a very difficult time in our lives as we disengage ourselves from so many contacts: selling our home, selling possessions. The hard part is saying good-bye to people we love—not that we lose relationships, but those relationships are different. But Patty and I, time after time again, fall back on the understanding that we cannot do this under our own power – there’s just no way. It’s the power of God Himself that will sustain us. Jesus gave the Holy Spirit to those who chose Him as Lord, and He has done the same for us. He has done the same to those who know Him as Savior. There is no way that we could do this.

I think back to when God breathed into the nostrils of Adam in Genesis 2:7 and gave life. In the same way, Jesus breathed on the disciples. And He breathes into us the Holy Spirit to empower us, to enable us to do the work that He wants us to do. The first part is He gives us a purpose to talk about Him. He gives us the power to be able to do it and to do it in the way that He desires.

And the third part of that commissioning that has sustained us and has directed our life is to realize that we’re involved in something of eternal significance. You know, I have treated many thousands of patients over 25 years as a physician—and it’s been a privilege. Fortunately, many of those people have gotten better. But every one of them will ultimately die.

But God gives us a purpose and the possibility of affecting the *eternal destiny* of every one of those people with whom we connect. I have had patients who have come to know the Lord because of a witness or a word. Those are people I’ve impacted in a way so uniquely that they’ll be forever with me in eternity in the presence of Jesus.

You see, we have an opportunity to do something that will last forever. What could be more wonderful? What could be a better way to spend our lives? We have purpose. We have power. We have eternal significance in what we do—all of us who believe in Jesus as Lord.

But remember now, when Jesus was talking to Thomas, what He said to him. “You believe because you’ve seen Me. Blessed are those who believe but have not seen.” How are those people going to believe? How are they going to know about Jesus unless somebody tells them?

Every one of us knows about Jesus because we've heard about Him from somebody. But there are so many who have never heard, not only in Ecuador, but in every country throughout the world. In fact, you have neighbors, you have people you work with daily, who have not heard about Jesus. That's where we as a church body are committed—and commanded—to go out and to tell people, and to live a life that reflects that change that Jesus makes in our lives by the Spirit living in us.

In Romans 10, Paul addresses that when he says:

for “Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved.” How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher [someone to proclaim]? How will they preach unless they are sent? (Romans 10:13-15a).

Patty and I consider it the greatest privilege to be sent by Lincoln Berean Church – which, of course, is not this building. It's those of you here in the sanctuary and in the upper room throughout the services this weekend. You're the ones who send us, and we thank you, and we need you. We need your prayers; we need your support; we need your encouragement.

But each one of you is sent in the same way. As you hear the charge that we're going to be given in just a few moments, place *your* name in there as well, because Jesus has that same purpose for *your* life. The same power is in *you* and the same eternal significance and destiny affects those people *you* reach. As you go to work, as you go to the store, as you go home to your family—around those that God brings to you—remember that this is what He has saved you for: to reveal Him and to love those around you.

So what we're doing is no different in Ecuador than what we've done here in Lincoln, Nebraska. But we thank you for giving us the opportunity to do it in a new location. We pray that as a church we continue to realize that this is His reason that He saved us—to bring us to Himself and many others as well.

Our Heavenly Father, we do thank You. We thank You for the gift of salvation that You have given us through Christ alone and the privilege we have in sharing that message with those around us. Lord, we ask that those whose hearts You are stirring to be missionaries here in Lincoln, in the surrounding counties, and throughout the world would have the courage to obey, to step forward and to speak the truth with love, and to live lives that make an eternal difference. I pray this in Christ our Lord, Amen.

*Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE
Copyright 1960, 1962, 1963, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1987, 1988,
The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.