

Our Threefold Commission

by Vance Havner

The church needs to see Jesus, the living Christ, and be commissioned to share Him with a bewildered world.

Scripture: Matthew 28:18, Mark 16:7

Topics: "Commissioning", "Proclaiming the Gospel"

Description

Vance Havner emphasizes the significance of the threefold commission given by Jesus after His resurrection, urging believers to share the message of Christ with a bewildered church, backslidden Christians, and a lost world. He reflects on how Jesus chose to reveal Himself only to His followers, highlighting the need for Christians to rekindle their excitement about the resurrection and to actively share this life-changing news. Havner points out that many in the church today are confused and distracted, forgetting the central message of Christ's victory over death. He encourages believers to focus on their relationship with Jesus, as He is the answer to their struggles and the source of their mission. Ultimately, the call is to proclaim the living Christ to all, reminding them of His power and presence.

Transcript

I revel in the story of our Lord's appearances during those forty wonderful days after His resurrection. How I would have enjoyed being there! Think of it! You might meet Jesus risen from the dead around any bend of the road!

Then I remember that He appeared only to believers. Why didn't He go to Herod or Pilate and say, "Look! You thought you had done away with me, but I'm back!" That wouldn't have been like Jesus. He made Himself known only to His own, and if others are to hear about Him today you and I must tell them.

Talk about a news story! Here is the greatest piece of news on earth! Jesus died and rose again! It is true, He really did it! They buried Him dead and He came back alive! It is the greatest news flash in history, but we Christians have gotten used to it. We've heard it until we've lost the thrill of it. We've mixed it up with Easter corsages, bunny rabbits, spring bonnets, and colored eggs.

We hear much of the Great Commission, but we have three commissions. To the women at the sepulcher the angel said, "Go tell his disciples" (Mark 16:7). WE HAVE A MESSAGE FOR A BEWILDERED CHURCH. These disciples were bewildered. Jesus had died; their dreams had faded; their hopes had vanished. They didn't know what to think. They couldn't put it together. Some had gone back to their old pursuits, shaking their heads. They were trying to live on the memory of a dead Christ and when that is all

you have, you are bewildered indeed.

But they were no more bewildered than the church today. Everywhere, Christians are confused, mystified, befuddled. Some are so taken up with their own problems that they cannot help others. Others are so busy trying to solve everybody else's problems that they have no time for their own. Some are chasing fads and isms, isms that soon become "wasms," out of date. Some churches are merely swapping members, moving corpses from one mausoleum to another. Some have made the Gospel a funeral and others have made it a frolic, and both have forgotten that it is a feast! Some freeze and some fry!

But we have a message for a bewildered church: "Go tell His disciples that He is going on before you!" The message is simply Christ. We need a new experience of the living Christ. He is not behind us in a tomb, He is ahead of us.

Consider the appearance of Jesus to Mary in the garden. First, there was MISERY: "Woman, why do you weep?" How many miserable Christians there are today! There was a MYSTERY: Mary didn't know where to find her Lord. So many today are out of touch with Jesus, not living in vital communion. Then, when Mary recognized Him, she called Him MASTER. The cure for the MISERY is to see the Master and acknowledge Him. But there was also a MISSION: "Go to thy brethren and say . . ." When we meet the Master, He commissions us.

The church needs to see Jesus. "Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord," not when they looked at each other. He is not real in our churches. If He were, we would not sit so lifelessly on Sunday, content with our formal uprisings and down-sittings, and go out as though we had met to honor a corpse instead of to hail a conqueror.

When we see Him we shall quit looking at ourselves -- and that ought to be a great relief. Some time ago, sitting in church, I gazed for a moment at a bright light overhead, and then when I looked around at the people I could see only the reflection of that light in their faces. And I wondered whether if we looked more at Him we should not see more of Him in our fellow Christians.

The bewildered church needs to see Him going on before. He is our Joshua, our Leader. The church has never had so many would-be leaders as today. Some small boys were asked, "What are you playing?" "War," they answered, "we are all generals." The church is overstaffed with generals. We need more and better privates. Everybody wants to pioneer, to start something. We have so many new movements that we can't move! We need to see our File-Leader going before us.

We have a second commission: "Go tell his disciples AND PETER." WE HAVE A MESSAGE FOR BACK-SLIDDEN CHRISTIANS. Peter was a backslider, and the Lord singled him out as though he were marked "Special." He was not out to get even with Peter but to restore him. We put such characters in the doghouse. We fire them out, but Jesus fired them up with new love and zeal.

What a field day for the gossips that must have been when Peter denied Jesus! Can't you imagine them whispering to each other, "Have you heard the latest? Rev. Simon Peter swore that he never knew Jesus. I never had much confidence in him and now I'm through with him forever." But our Lord didn't feel that way about His wayward disciple. We need an Anti-vivisection Society in our churches, considering the way we dissect our brethren who sin not unto death instead of praying for them.

If you are a backslider the Lord is looking for you. When Jesus met Peter He asked him, "Do you love me?" He made Himself the issue. The message for backsliders is just this: they need to see Jesus. We lambaste the erring or we ignore them. Jesus did neither. He did not begin by asking Peter, "Aren't you ashamed of yourself?" He asked, "Do you love me?" To begin with, on the night Peter denied Jesus it was a look and not a lecture that sent Peter out to weep bitterly. We skin the saints alive on card-playing, dancing, theatre-going, and we don't get very far. After all, you don't have to discuss such questions with people who really love the Lord. It is the wilderness crowd, seeking garlic instead of glory, melons instead of miracles, that asks, "What is wrong with this? Why is it wrong to do that?" People who are over in the Land, keeping step with our Joshua, never ask such questions. A man who is really living on figs and pomegranates, milk and honey, is not likely to start sighing for the fleshpots of Egypt. The real issue in separation is not quitting this or that, but "let us go forth unto him." The issue is Christ. "Do you love ME?" Backslider, you have an appointment with Jesus and the sooner you get together, the better.

We have a third commission, the Great Commission to go into all the world and make disciples. WE HAVE A MESSAGE FOR A BENIGHTED WORLD. And that message is Christ. He is the Center: "All power is given unto me; Lo, I am with you always." The world is the Circumference. In His interview with Peter He was the Center: "Do you love ME?" But there was also the Circumference: "Feed my sheep." In geometry we use a compass. One prong is stationary, fixed. With the other we describe our circle. Christ is the fixed Center, the same yesterday, today, forever. From that Center we make the sweep of the whole world as our circumference. "What the world needs is Jesus," "We've a story to tell to the nations," and we are out to win them not to a way of life or even to Christianity, but to Christ.

We have SOMETHING BACK OF US: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." There are our resources. Our Lord always makes His propositions against the background of His resources. "All things are delivered unto me of my Father . . . Come unto me" (Matt. 11:27, 28). Again, "The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. He that believes on the Son has everlasting life" (John 3:35, 36). And here is the Great Commission: "All power is given unto me . . . Go." Put them together and we have, "All things are mine: Come, Believe, Go." And that is the full Christian experience.

There is not only something back of us, there is SOMETHING BEFORE US: "all the world." And we also have SOMEONE WITH US: "Lo, I am with you." And let us not forget that our message is Christ Himself. We try to match the world's wit and cleverness. We try to meet it on its own ground and amuse it and entertain it. We give it a glorified hash, a religious mulligan stew of ethics and psychology and philosophy. We forget that what we have that the world doesn't have is Jesus. There is no point in trying to meet it with something it already has. We are ministers, not mimics; apostles, not apes. We are to let our light shine, and that light is Christ. It is a glow, not a glare, and we do not shine it, we let it shine.

"Go tell the disciples; go tell Peter; go tell the world." And tell them about Jesus, dead, risen, and alive forevermore!

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