

EASTER – A NEW FOCUS

When Cynthia Manley realized she had only twenty minutes left to live, she figured that the best thing she could do with the time she had left was to send text messages to her two daughters. Her one daughter, Alanna, was a student at Seattle University. She texted, “Stay strong and no matter what happens take care of yourself and your sister. Find a way to get to California and be together soon and be a family. I love you so much.” To her other daughter, Alyssa, she wrote, “No matter what happens get your degree! Have a good life and be successful! And take care of your sister.”

What would you do if you had twenty minutes left to live? Who would you write and what would you say? It turned out that Cynthia Manley had much more than twenty minutes to live. In fact, she and most of the state of Hawaii are still alive today. Maybe you read how in January of 2018, a state worker chose the wrong menu item for the state missile alert system and sent an alert to the entire island that said, “Ballistic missile threat inbound to Hawaii. Seek immediate shelter. This is not a drill.” For about half an hour, many people in the state thought they were about to die in a nuclear blast. Maybe you saw the photos of parents lowering their children down into manholes for shelter.

Fortunately, it was a happy ending for everyone. Well, maybe not so much for the guy who sent out the wrong message alert! I am sure he is enjoying his new job in Alaska. In fact, I would say that it could have been a gift to some people because it caused them to think about what really matters in life. What would you do if you only had 20 minutes to live? One thing is for sure, it would have been an indicator for what was really important in your life.

Today we are continuing in our series Easter Challenge. We have looked at the fact that, because of Easter, our Foundation and Fellowship is different. Today I want to talk about the fact that, because of Easter, our Focus is different.

2Co 5:11-15 Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience. 12 We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again, but are giving you an opportunity to take pride in us, so that you can answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart. 13 If we are out of our mind, it is for the sake of God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. 14 For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. 15 And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

What is the primary focus of your life? This passage of scripture reminds us of what it should be.

1. Our Worldview – we know the truth

It says in verse 11, “Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men.” We talked about this 2 weeks ago. Because of Easter we know the truth. I do not know if you have 20 minutes left to live or 20 years. What I do know is one day all of us are going to have to stand before God and give account for our lives. You may die today, or you may remain alive until Jesus returns. I believe that we are in the Last Days, but that could be a few weeks or a hundred years. One day we will have to give an account. Hopefully that conversation will be like what is recorded in Matt 25;

Mat 25:23 His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

It is only by faith in Jesus that we go to heaven. It is only by accepting His gift of salvation that we are saved. As it says in verse 11, "Since ... we know what it is to fear the Lord." That means that we know the truth and have received it into our lives. What is the truth?

A million years from now every person that has ever existed will still be alive. They will be living in one of two locations. They will either be in heaven with Jesus or they will be in hell, forever separated from his love and presence. This is what the bible says;

2 Cor 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

What does it mean to fear the Lord? It does not mean that we are afraid of God. It means that we understand that there is a heaven and a hell, and that what we do in this life determines where we will spend the next. Fearing the Lord simply means that we understand the truth of our existence;

1Jn 4:15-18 If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. 16 And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. 17 In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. 18 There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

I do not fear God, I love Him – and I know that He loves me. There is no fear in love. If someone loves you then you know that they would never hurt you.

Years ago, a military officer and his wife were aboard a ship crossing the Atlantic that was caught in a raging ocean storm. Seeing the frantic look in his wife's eyes, the man tried unsuccessfully to allay her fears. Suddenly she grasped his sleeve and cried, "How can you be so calm?" He stepped back a few feet and drew his sword. Pointing it at her heart, he said, "Are you afraid of this?" Without hesitation she answered, "Of course not!" "Why not?" he inquired. "Because it's in your hand, and you love me too much to hurt me." To this he replied, "Yes, and I know the One who holds the winds and the waters in the hollow of His hand, and He will surely care for us!"

I know that someday I will have to stand in heaven and give an account of my life. I know that, on that day, my sins will be covered by the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. I know that, because of Easter, my sins are paid for. Because I know that truth, I have zero fear of death.

If you have never received Jesus, if you have never received the gift of eternal life He offers, then your sins are not paid for. When you die you will stand before God and have to pay for those sins yourself. If you do not have Jesus in your life, you should be afraid, very afraid. This is our worldview.

2. Our Witness – we love others

Because we know the truth, we try to persuade people to choose life and not death. We do this because we love them. If you knew that someone was in trouble and you were able to help but instead you chose to do nothing, that would be terrible. You have heard the slogan "Friends don't let friends drive drunk." Friends do not let people they love perish needlessly.

Verse 11 says “What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience.” Often, we as Christians are frowned upon because of our evangelistic efforts. The media is offended by our desire to share our faith.

We are compared to advertisers, trying to get people to buy something we know they do not need and cannot afford. We do not share Christ with people for our own sake. We do not do it to get brownie points with God. We do it because we love them. Our motives are pure. We are simply people that have found something that has changed our lives and we want other people to find that same power and joy as well.

Evangelism is not salesmanship. It is not urging people, pressing them, coercing them, overwhelming them, or subduing them. Evangelism is telling a message. Evangelism is reporting good news.

Verse 14 says “Christ's love compels us.” What does that mean? It means that the love of Jesus we have experienced compels us to share that love with others. When you find something of great worth and value that gives you joy then you have to share it with others! My wife Naomi once won an antique chair in a raffle. The first thing she did was call her friends to tell them.

Lee Strobel tells the story of a time when he felt God prompting him to go and share an Easter invitation in the business office of the newspaper where he worked. He didn't know why but he chose to be obedient. When he got to work, he saw his friend who was working in the business office. He went in and asked if he wanted to go to church with him that Easter Sunday.

The friend said, “No, I'm an atheist, I don't observe Easter.” Lee told him that Easter was when Jesus rose from the dead and the friend said, “No, he did not. I do not believe that.” Lee went on to give the historical evidence that he did but he could see the friend was not interested. He went on to say that he knew that he liked music and that his church had great music but the friend interrupted, “Lee, I don't want to go to your stupid church.” So, he walked away, not understanding why God would have placed that burden upon him only to have his friend reject the offer.

Years after that he was a pastor at this church outside Chicago. He had preached one Sunday and a guy came up and thanked him for the huge difference he had made in his life. Lee did not recognize the man at all so he asked who he was. Then he told him this story.

A few years ago, he had lost his job. He had no money in the bank and was afraid he was going to lose his house. He went to the newspaper and asked if they had any work and they said they had a job repairing the tile flooring in one of the offices. He took the job and went to the office. It was just before Easter. As he was in the office on his hands and knees on the floor behind a desk you walked in the door. You did not know I was there. You start talking to this guy about God, the resurrection and the historical evidence that Jesus rose from the dead. You invited that guy to church but he shut you down. As I knelt there on hands and knees behind this desk my heart was beating fast. I knew I needed God and I needed to go to church. Right after you left, I called my wife and said, “We are going to church on Easter”. We went to church and my wife and I and our teenage son came to faith. He ended saying, “I just wanted to thank you.”

Christ's love compels us. As we are faithful to God's direction to speak His truth and tell others the good news of his offer of salvation, we will see lives transformed. This is our worldview and our witness.

3. Our Works – we live for Christ

The scripture that we read today ends saying;

2 Cor 5:15 And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

Because of Easter, we no longer live for ourselves but for Jesus. We have a new foundation, a new fellowship and a new focus. We have been bought at a price. We have surrendered our lives and made Jesus Lord. We are different. We have different priorities and a different purpose. Because of that, our lives should look different.

When I was in High School my first job was for Big V Drug Store. I was a cleaner, I was responsible for cleaning up the garbage and vacuuming the store. Eventually I became a delivery driver. I was then responsible to deliver things that people had ordered to their homes. Imagine if, after I had become a delivery driver, that I continued to just try and clean the store. Do you think my boss would have been happy with me? Of course not. My job had changed, and because of that the things I was expected to do had changed as well.

You cannot become a Christian and just continue to act the same way you acted before coming to Christ. It is impossible, because your life has changed. You have a new role, new responsibilities. Everything about you should now be different. So, let me ask you a question. How are you different today because of Easter? What would you be like today if you had never become a Christian?

There are more than 50,000 churches and more than 50 million Christians in South Korea today. Back in the 1700s Catholic priests had gone to Korea and some Koreans had come to Christ, but in 1866 these converts (more than 8000) were killed by the government. One of the first Protestant missionaries to Korea was a man named Robert Jermain Thomas. He was a Welsh missionary with the London Missionary Society. In 1863 he went to Beijing and met two Korean traders who told him about the Catholic converts and the fact that they did not have any Bibles. Thomas travelled to Korea to distribute Bibles.

Because he could speak the language, he found a job as a translator on an American ship named the General Sherman. As the boat travelled around Korea, Thomas handed out Bibles. One day the ship was attacked by the Korean army near Pyongyang. It ran aground and was soon overrun by soldiers. With his last breath Thomas was handing out bibles to the angry crowd shouting “Jesus, Jesus” in Korean. The crowds attacked and killed him.

The Korean authorities ordered people to destroy all the Bibles that had been handed out. But instead some used them as wallpaper. In time the Korean people began to read their wallpaper and some came to believe in Jesus. Others began coming to their homes to read the words on the walls and within 15 years the first church had been planted. Within 30 years Pyongyang had become a strong Christian center with over a hundred churches planted. The rest is history. Fifty Million Christians and one of the greatest missionary sending nations on earth.

This is what can happen when one person surrenders their life completely to Christ and is willing to do whatever God calls them to do.

Robert Jermain Thomas had a change in his worldview that changed his life. It became the driving force behind his witness and works and ended up costing him everything, including his life. He was different, because of Easter. That is the difference that Easter makes. We have a new focus. Our worldview, witness and works are different.

I think most people know that Chuck Norris died last week. You have probably heard one of the many Chuck Norris jokes like, "A King Cobra once bit Chuck Norris, and after 5 days of intense pain the snake finally died."

What you may not know is that he is a Christian. When he was 12 years old, he came forward at a Billy Graham crusade and accepted Christ as his Savior. But he never really fully surrendered his life to Christ.

He went on to become the karate middleweight champion of the world for eight straight years. He appeared in karate movies, and in one movie, he fights against Bruce Lee in a death match! Years later, he starred in the TV series Walker, Texas Ranger. He was successful in almost every area of his life, but he knew that something was still missing. One day, he came home and he saw his wife Gina reading the Bible. He said to her, "You're not getting religious on me, are you?" She said "This is good stuff! You should read this." So, he sat down with her on the couch and read the Bible.

The Spirit of God began to work in him. He felt like God was saying to him, "You need to come back to me. You need to finish what you started when you were 12 years old! You need to make Me the Lord of your life." And so, Chuck Norris surrendered his life to Christ. Except this time, his life was transformed. If you watch the last two seasons of Walker, Texas Ranger, you see a much stronger emphasis on faith in Christ. After the show ended, he and his wife got involved in all kinds of different ministries. His life was changed when he moved from simply believing that Jesus was lord to making the decision to make Jesus his Lord. He moved from simple understanding to an encounter with the risen Jesus.

That is the difference that Easter makes. We have a new foundation, fellowship and focus.