

# Evangelism: A Commitment to Duty

By Jim Davis

I have some good friends who sold their comfortable home and bought some land outside of Houston, Texas in order to minister to inner city children and to the children of incarcerated men and women. Although the ministry is in its beginning stages it has already had an incredible impact in the lives of many children. This ministry stands out to the glory of God where so many of the activities done in the Christian church pale by comparison. There are two things that strike me about what I have observed. The first thing is that numerous other churches and Christian organizations have passed by the opportunity. They may have had more financial means and greater potential for impact but they either overlooked it or chose not to do it. The second thing that I observed was that compassion was the motivating factor.

I think these things are true of every great work of ministry. In the 19th century when Hudson Taylor began his mission to inland China he went where other organizations would not go. His heart was burdened with compassion for the multitudes that had not heard the gospel of Jesus Christ. His love for God compelled him to go where others would not go. It was the horror of seeing orphans housed in sanitariums for the mentally disturbed in England that motivated George Mueller to start his first orphanage.

In last month's article we observed some principles about sowing seed in evangelism from John 4:27-30. Jesus and the Samaritan woman serve as examples as they ignored prejudice and personal feelings to bring others to knowledge of the gospel. People who sow in evangelism ignore the social and cultural bias. People who sow in evangelism also are willing to *go* in order to reach out to others. They make the necessary ***commitment to action*** in order to sow the seed.

In this article Jesus teaches some general principles about laboring for fruit of life eternal. These principles are true for those who sow the gospel as well as for those who reap. In whatever way you work for God's glory you will need to understand ***the commitment to duty***.

## The Commitment to Duty

(John 4:31-34)

Those who labor for eternal things must readjust priorities in life so they learn to recognize divine opportunities and they must exercise focus and determination to finish the work. Paul says, "Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving; praying at the same time for us as well, that God may open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned; in order that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak..." (Col. 4:2-4) The Samaritan woman had gone into the city and was bringing a crowd of people back out to meet the Messiah. Even as the crowd was approaching the disciples were trying to get Jesus to eat. The Bible indicates that they were nagging Jesus. They were repeatedly requesting that He would eat the food that they had brought out of the city. We can only speculate as to why the disciples were nagging Jesus about eating food. The best case would be that they were genuinely concerned for Jesus' health. It could be that they were frustrated that they had gone to all the work to get the food and now dinner was getting cold or they may have just

been very hungry themselves. Whatever the disciples' motives, Jesus was demonstrating a lesson on priority.

### **Readjust Your Priorities**

Jesus' response to the disciples was, "I have food to eat that you do not know about" (v. 31). Jesus recognized the events taking place as a test. The disciples did not see it but the sovereign hand of God's providence had opened a door of opportunity for fruit of eternal life. Jesus put aside physical hunger to labor for eternal fruit. We find this same type of test occurred with the first generation of Israel coming out of Egypt. Deuteronomy 8:3 reads, "He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord."

The disciples did not understand what Jesus was referring to but began to question whether Jesus had already eaten. If you have ever had the experience of walking into a classroom only to discover that you were going to be taking a test, it will give you some idea of the disciples' predicament. They are not prepared. This is one of the greatest areas of difficulty in the believers' walk with God. So many times as we study through the Bible, God's people were not ready for the test. So many times in our personal experiences we simply are not ready for the tests of life. But the Bible tells us that Jesus "humbled Himself and became obedient even to the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:8).

Jesus gives a great example of what it means for "man not to live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." "Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work'" (John 5:34). A test comes when physical and temporal values conflict with the eternal values that are prescribed in God's word. We come to a point of crisis where a choice is required to obey the will of God or our own will. We must readjust our priorities and lay aside personal desire for God's desire. This is what Jesus was teaching His disciples. The question becomes, is the word of God your priority? Do you feed upon God's will for your life? And do you recognize those providential opportunities for ministry to others? Samaritans are more important than lunch!

### **Complete the task**

Doing God's will must be our priority but He also demonstrated the determination and focus that is necessary to pass the final exam. Jesus said His food was also "to complete (finish) His work." To complete the work means we lay the sandwich aside and we do the work until the work is done. We need both urgency and determination in God's work. In this context it was to tell the Samaritans the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Jesus began His ministry and completed it, feeding upon the work of His Father. His focus and determination to do the will of the Father eventually brought Him to Gethsemane and on to Calvary where He passed the final exam. Feeding upon His Father's work He said, "not My will but Thine be done" (Luke 22:42) and His last words, "it is finished" (John 19:30). Jesus never lost sight of His commitment to duty.

Love for the Father is what motivated Jesus to readjust His priorities and focus upon the completion of His Father's work. Compassion for people is what made Jesus' response to this situation different from the disciples' response. This would sum up the first great commandment and the second commandment. "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.'" "This is the first and foremost com-

mandment. And a second is like it; 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'. On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 22:37-40). Any sustained commitment to duty will be motivated by these truths.

### **Conclusion**

Have you ever wondered what it means for man not to live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God? The Word made flesh demonstrates what it means for us in this passage. Jesus loves the Father and is committed to doing the work that His Father sent Him to do. The disciples were holding the bread before Jesus but His gaze was upon the Samaritan people as they poured out of the city to meet the Messiah and hear the words of life. His priority was established and His determination was set upon finishing the task. Jesus was fed by the compassion of His Father for lost men. Are You?

Next month's article will be on the commitment of time in evangelism.