

Maximize – Maximize God's Truth

Feb. 23, 2020 – Pastor Randy

William Still, like many others who worked to emancipate slaves and to abolish the practice, put their lives at risk to do so. They didn't do it because it was easy. They did what they did because they had a conviction that those enslaved had the right to be free. They felt they had a responsibility to help those who were in bondage find freedom.

The scripture is concerned with both physical bondage and spiritual bondage. The message of Christianity is the good news that through Jesus we can experience freedom from all oppression. The American slave trade was built on the premise that some people were inherently inferior to others and could therefore be treated as property rather than accorded their full humanity.

Our mission is to learn, live, and share the good news of Jesus! This good news is the news that redemption is now available to all through faith in Jesus Christ. Last week I told you this word redemption is one of many words used in the NT to describe what God has done for us through Jesus. The word conveys the idea of liberation secured by the payment of a price. Redemption is even better than emancipation. Emancipation says you are free but you are on your own. You belong to no one but yourself. Redemption says you have been freed to belong to the God who created you. Redemption doesn't mean there is no master. It means there is only one master – the God who created you! And by belonging to Him you are now free to live under his providence and protection and guidance and experience the true meaning of abundant life. In the NT letter to Titus Paul wrote that "*our great God and Savior Jesus Christ...gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.*"(Titus 2:14). In Paul's farewell address to the church at Ephesus he charged the leaders to "*feed the church of God, which he purchased with his very own blood.*"(Acts 20:28).

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The most profound statement of the blessing of redemption is in Revelation 5:9-10. John recorded his vision of Jesus being worshipped in song in heaven. The words being sung were, "with your own blood you purchased a people for God, from every tribe and tongue, from every people and nation and made them a kingdom and priests to our God and they will reign on the earth." Those who are redeemed by Jesus are freed from their old slave master of sin to serve their master Jesus who places them in a position of royal priests who reign on the earth.

The good news of the gospel is good news about a redemption God has already provided for us now and a redemption that still awaits us. To the Christians at Ephesus Paul wrote, "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace" (Eph. 1:7)

It is the good news about a redemption that will one day bring about complete freedom from all brokenness and corruption. Paul encouraged the suffering Christians at Rome by assuring them that when Jesus returned "creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God." (Romans 8:21) and that "we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies."

We were rescued from the penalty of sin. We are being rescued from the power of sin. We will be rescued from the very presence of sin. Our responsibility is to be good stewards of this great news.

So look at Apollos and me as mere servants of Christ who have been put in charge of explaining God's mysteries. Now, a person who is put in charge as a manager must be faithful. As for me, it matters very little how I might be evaluated by you or by any human authority. I don't even trust my own judgment on this point. My conscience is clear, but that doesn't prove I'm right. It is the Lord himself who will examine me and decide. - 1 Corinthians 4:1-2

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1 Thess. 2:2-6

You know how badly we had been treated at Philippi just before we came to you and how much we suffered there. Yet our God gave us the courage to declare his Good News to you boldly, in spite of great opposition. So you can see we were not preaching with any deceit or impure motives or trickery.

For we speak as messengers approved by God to be entrusted with the Good News. Our purpose is to please God, not people. He alone examines the motives of our hearts. Never once did we try to win you with flattery, as you well know. And God is our witness that we were not pretending to be your friends just to get your money! As for human praise, we have never sought it from you or anyone else.

In both of these passages God's Word is a resource that must be faithfully managed (put to good use). Of all the resources entrusted to us by God, no resource is more precious than the truth God has revealed to us in His Word. Knowledge and understanding of the truth is our most valuable and sacred resource because it instructs us how to steward all our other resources. Being good stewards of God's word involves faithfulness on three levels:

1. Faithful to SHARE it and not keep it to yourself.
2. Faithful to SHARE it from the right motives.
3. Faithful to SHARE it, not distort it.

1. Faithful to SHARE God's Truth

In the NT it is clear that God calls and equips certain individuals, by His Spirit, to bear a specific responsibility to preach and teach. The NT also reveals that this responsibility is not solely the responsibility of prophets, evangelists, apostles, pastors, and teachers. Every Christian has the responsibility to be a faithful steward of the truth which they have received.

But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who

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Speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. 1 Peter 3:15-17

On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria...Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. Acts 8:1,4

Challenges to sharing:

a. There is Opposition to the Gospel.

In Paul's first letter to the Thessalonian Christians he wrote, "Yet our God gave us the courage to declare his Good News to you boldly, in spite of great opposition." There is a reason why the underground railroad was "underground"! There was opposition. Slaveholders didn't want emancipation. When sharing the good news that Jesus has come to set people free from their sin, we will face opposition from those who don't recognize their enslaved condition and from those who have a self interest in other people remaining enslaved!

b. We are Ill-Equipped

Part of being a good steward is equipping yourself. There are many resources online that can help you learn how to communicate the gospel. In order to improve your ability to communicate good news you must do it. I am seeking God for direction regarding how we can help equip our members in this area. The best place to start is to "tell your story"!

2. Faithful to SHARE it from the right motives.

When Paul wrote to the church at Corinth he said that he wasn't trying to impress human authorities. To the church at Thessalonica he wrote that he didn't preach for any human reward; not for money and not for praise. He was motivated by a love for God and people. If we love God, we will prepare ourselves to share with others the hope that we receive from the gospel. We

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will not prepare to share so we can win an argument. We won't prepare to share because we want to impress somebody with our knowledge. We won't prepare because we are trying to gain a "conversion" notch on our belt. I have heard people brag about how many people they have "brought to Christ. I spoke with someone recently who told me about a church where the leaders set a goal for number of baptisms. The problem with this approach is that the gospel is often watered down in order to get a response. If we become more concerned with the number of baptisms we perform than we are with the actual spiritual condition of those baptized, we have not been faithful stewards of God's word. That's not love for God or for people.

Jesus taught because he was moved with compassion. Peter wrote that when we give a defense of what we believe we should always do it with respect. Paul wrote, *"My heart is filled with bitter sorrow and unending grief for my people, my Jewish brothers and sisters. I would be willing to be forever cursed—cut off from Christ!—if that would save them."* He also said, "Woe to me if I fail to preach the gospel. "Woe to me" is like saying, "Blood on my hands!"

In 2 Corinthians 5 Paul cites two motivations for his missionary activity: The fear of the Lord and the love of Christ. He shared the gospel as an expression of honor to God and compassion for people. Love for God and love for people!

3. Faithful to SHARE it, not distort it.

Dear friends, I had been eagerly planning to write to you about the salvation we all share. But now I find that I must write about something else, urging you to defend the faith that God has entrusted once for all time to his holy people. I say this because some ungodly people have wormed their way into your churches, saying that God's marvelous grace allows us to live immoral lives. The condemnation of such people was recorded long ago, for they have denied our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

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Jude began his epistle informing his readers that what he had written was not what he had been “eager to write about”. Instead he wrote what was necessary; calling his readers to contend against false teaching (Jude 3). Everyone enjoys preaching and teaching messages that affirm, inspire, and encourage but correcting and defending truth against error is necessary because of the profit derived from it.

If I want someone to accept Jesus as Savior and embrace Christianity and I discover that they won't accept what the Bible says about who Jesus is and they don't respect Jesus's teaching, what should I do? If by leaving out the aspects of his nature and the content of his teaching that are unacceptable to them or offensive to them they might be more likely to come to faith. The only problem is that they won't have come to faith in Jesus; just someone else with the same name!! Unfortunately, that someone else can't save them.

In our first text today we read these words by Paul: *I don't even trust my own judgment on this point. My conscience is clear, but that doesn't prove I'm right. It is the Lord himself who will examine me and decide.* He was demonstrating the humility necessary of a faithful steward. The faithful steward, recognizing we are prone to fail, does his best to communicate the Gospel accurately and truthfully.

If I told you I had a letter from God addressed to you and I will remain up front after church to distribute them, what would you do? Would you knock people over to get to the front of the line? Would you patiently wait on line to get yours? Would you leave without it? He has written to us. The scriptures are the inspired word of God for us! And they reveal the truth, not only for us, but for the whole world. Faithful stewards of God will devote themselves to learn, live, and share the truth God has disclosed to us!