

Well today we are wrapping up our Rekindle series. So far we've looked at rekindling our worship, our prayer life, our need to multiply and make disciples. In week four we talked about Christian community. Last week we looked at serving one another. And today as we come to the end, I want to talk to you about sharing Jesus with others or witnessing.

All four gospels end in a similar fashion, with a word from Jesus to go and tell. In Matthew, "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." In Mark chapter 16, "Go into all the world and preach the good news." In the last chapter of Luke, Jesus is meeting with his disciples and he says, "You witnessed me suffer, die and come back to life. Therefore, repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in my name to all nations." In the gospel of John, Jesus says, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And then you come to Acts, the story of the church, this movement that Jesus left behind to represent him and move his mission and message forward. And he says, "And you're going to receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses right here in your hometown, and throughout this region I've placed you, and even to the ends of the earth." Now think of all the things Jesus could have said here. He could have said, "You will be my humble servants." or, "You will be my prayer warriors." or, "You will be my Bible studiers." And all those would have been true. But he chose to say, "You will be my witnesses." That's who Jesus has called us to be. Every single one of us, His witness.

And this is something that we need to be reminded for multiple reasons but especially because of what's at stake. We are talking about a person's eternal destiny. Folks heaven and hell are real. And every person will spend an eternity in one of those two places. And where a person spends their eternity, in heaven or hell, is totally dependent upon what they do with Jesus Christ. Now I realize that this unpopular and widely unaccepted in our culture. What is popular and accepted is this idea that all roads lead to God so it doesn't really matter what you believe because in the end it will all work out just fine. You know this idea that God is like the top of a mountain. You can be at the bottom and take this trail, and I can be on the opposite side and take a completely different trail and it really doesn't matter what path we're on because we're all moving in the same direction and in the end, we all end up in the same place. We've just gone different routes to get there. That's what our society likes to believe. That it doesn't matter what you believe because in the end we all reach the same place.

But Scripture and more specifically, Jesus Christ says that's not how it works. Over and over again we are told in Scripture that if a person rejects Jesus Christ, his free gift of salvation and they die in their sins then they will spend an eternity suffering and separated from God in hell. And the primary source we hear about this suffering and separation from God in hell is from Jesus Christ. Jesus spoke more about hell than he did about heaven to communicate that it is real, it is terrible, and something to be feared and to be avoided. The Bible makes it abundantly clear that there is a real haven, but not everyone is going there. That's why we need to speak up and share Jesus with others. Because of what's at stake.

Let me ask you, do you believe this? Because you speak about what you believe. You know this to be true because you do it all the time. If you go to a restaurant and it's amazing. I mean the food, the ambiance, the service, the whole dining experience, just amazing. What do you do? You're taking pictures of your meal and posting them. You're telling everyone about it. "Have you been there yet? No! Oh man, you gotta go there. And get the tenderloin. It's to die for. Oh and the sides are incredible! I mean I could just order the sides for my meal. And you gotta save room for dessert. Best cheesecake I've ever had. Trust me, you gotta try this place out." That's what we do. We talk about what we believe. There's a new Netflix series and you watch like all four seasons over the weekend. You don't get up from the couch. You're glued to it. So what do you do? You tell everyone about the series. "Have you seen it? You haven't! Oh man, you're missing out. You gotta check it out. It's amazing. You'll love it, I promise." That's what we do, we speak about what we believe.

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So let me ask you, do you really believe what we've been talking about today? Do you really believe that heaven and hell are real? Do you really believe that Jesus Christ is the answer? Do you really believe that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life and that no one comes to the Father except through him? Do you really believe that salvation is found only in Jesus? Do you really believe that what a person does with Jesus determines where they spend their eternity? Do you really believe that people need Jesus? Then my follow up question to you is, are you telling others about him and how to be saved? Because you speak about what you believe.

Now real quick I want to go to Luke chapter 15 and leave you with one big thought that I hope and pray rekindles your passion for sharing Jesus with all. So if you have your Bible go ahead and grab it and flip over to the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter of the gospel according to Luke. **Verses 1 and 2** sets it all up for us. "Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. 2 But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

Now understand what's going on here. Get the picture of what's taking place. Jesus is surrounded by a large group of outsiders; men and women that are irreligious and far from God. Luke divides them into two categories: tax collectors and sinners. These two groups were the lowest of the low in Jewish society. They were detested and despised. They were the social and religious outcasts in Jesus' day. Yet they're around Jesus and Jesus is around them. And I love that don't you? We should celebrate that but verse 2 tells us that this drove the religious establishment in Jesus' day absolutely crazy. To the point where they actually began to criticize Jesus for the company he kept. They muttered and griped and complained because the sinless Son of God spent time with that group of people. And in response to their criticism Jesus tells three stories in rapid fire succession about "those kind of people" and what God actually thinks of them, and how God truly feels about them.

There was once a shepherd, Jesus said, that had 100 sheep. And he notices that one of them is missing. So he leaves the 99 and searches everywhere for that one lost sheep. Up the hillside, down by the brook, in the pasture he's calling and searching. And finally he finds it and carries the sheep back home. Overjoyed that he has found that which is lost, he calls his friends and neighbors together and throws a party. And before moving onto story number 2, Jesus says in **verse 7**, "I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent."

And without giving the Pharisees and teachers of the Law an opportunity to object or interject, Jesus tells another story. Suppose a woman loses a coin. But understand this is not pocket change we're talking about here. This coin is not just any old coin. This coin has significant value because this coin is a symbol of marriage. Today ladies, it would be like losing your engagement ring.

See in Jesus' day women wore as a frontlet or a headdress a collection of coins as a symbol of marriage. This coin is part of a set, it's part of a whole. So with it missing the set is incomplete and lacking. With it missing, she's sick to her stomach. So she lights an oil lamp and takes some palm leaves to sweep the floor. Furniture is moved, the house is a wreck, literally turned upside down, as she's down on her hands and knees searching for that one lost coin. Finally, she finds it and calls her friends and neighbors together for a celebration. And then Jesus says in **verse 10**, "In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

And if by chance they still aren't getting what Jesus is saying, to drive the point down even deeper, Jesus tells another story. There was a father that had two sons. And one day the youngest comes to his father

and says, “Dad, I’m sick and tired of your rules. I’m sick and tired of living under your roof. Give me my inheritance now!” The father’s heart is broken. He can’t believe what he’s just heard. But nonetheless, he pulls out his checkbook and writes his son a check. Soon after that, the boy gathers all his belongings and hitchhikes as far away from his dad as he possibly can. He cashes the check and cashes in on his new found freedom. He’s the life of the party. Everyone knows who he is and everyone wants to be around him. His nights are full of friends and fun. But eventually the money runs out and so does the fun and friends. He blows through his inheritance about as quickly as he received it. And the timing couldn’t have been worse, because right around the time his bank account runs dry and so does the land. There’s a severe famine. And to make matters worse, his so called friends are missing in action, they’re nowhere to be found, they’re no longer taking his calls. He’s desperate for work so he accepts the only job on the table, feeding pigs. And there in the fields, feeding these pigs with his stomach growling and empty, he longs to eat the food that they’re eating.

And then it dawns on him that his father’s workers have it better than he does. So he writes this really touching heartfelt speech: “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.” He rehearses that speech over and over until he has it down pat, and then he heads back to his dad. But while he was still a long way off (Oh please, don’t miss that). While he was a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him. And he ran to his son and threw his arms around him and began to kiss him. The son goes right into his prepared speech but the father has his mind on other things. His mind is not on a lecture or punishment or having the son work off what was wasted. His mind wasn’t on the family name that was disgraced and drug through the mud. The father’s mind was on a party. “Quick” he said to his servants. “Bring the best robe and put it on my son. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and now is found.”

All people. Let me say it again. All people matter to God. Regardless of who they are and what they’ve done. They matter to God. He loves them. He died to save them. He passionately and persistently pursues them. And when he finds them he rejoices. When the lost is found he celebrates. So let me tell you what this means, here’s the big thought I want you to take home with you today. You will never meet someone, you will never say hello to someone, you will never exchange glances with someone, you will never pass by someone who does not matter immensely to God. And if today you begin to understand this scriptural truth and let it sink deep down into your heart and take root there, you’ll never look at people the same again. You’ll see them the way God sees them. And when you see people the way that God sees them it will rattle you to your core. You’ll never be the same again. You’ll see people differently. You’ll treat people differently. And you won’t be able to keep the good news and love of Jesus Christ to yourself.