



TRUTH

“... thy word is truth” (John 17:17)

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TELL ME ABOUT THE EARTHLY MISSION OF JESUS

About two thousand years ago, Jesus lived on earth as a human. In Bible language, the Word became flesh and dwelt among men (John 1:14).

While living in a human body, the Christ shared the same experiences which other humans do. He was hungry, He slept, He was tempted, and He cried. But why did He come? Why did He live on the earth for more than thirty years? What was His mission?

Let us first observe some things which Jesus did not come to accomplish. For instance, Jesus' purpose in coming to earth was *not* to:

- Remove every problem which humans face
- Eradicate all sickness and disease
- Improve the world's economy
- Settle all domestic disagreements
- Make the world a better place (He certainly did that, but that was not His ultimate goal)
- Change the world by political activism
- Overthrow civil government
- Establish an earthly kingdom

If the above matters do not indicate Jesus' mission in coming to earth, what light does the Bible shed on His *real* purpose in coming?

Jesus came **to save sinners**. Before the Christ was born, an angel of God told Joseph, the husband of Mary: “*And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins*” (Matthew 1:21). God chose the name “Jesus.” Why *that* name? Because He was going to save people from sin. What does “Jesus” mean? It means Jehovah is salvation.

Jesus said He came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). Paul also affirmed, “*This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners . . .*” (1 Timothy 1:15).

Thus, Jesus came to be “*Savior of the world*” (1 John 4:14). Sinners are those who have transgressed God's will and stand lost without Him. Jesus came to save people of all races and backgrounds, regardless of the kinds of sins they have committed. The remedy for man's sin is not to become better people or increase the number of good works we do. Salvation

is granted to humans only through the blood of Jesus, who willingly laid down His life, becoming a sacrificial lamb on our behalf (John 1:29). Brothers and sisters, if we are going to “preach Jesus” in a biblical sense, we will preach Him as Savior, the only remedy for mankind's rebellion against the Creator.

Jesus also came **to serve humans**. He declared, “*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many*” (Mark 10:45). The Christ, who was the servant of God (Matthew 12:18), took on the form of a bondservant and became the servant of humanity (Philippians 2:7). While on earth, our Lord “*went about doing good*” (Acts 10:38). While His mission was not simply to help others, serving them was a part of His role. He showed incredible compassion, thoughtfulness, and love, leaving us a perfect model to imitate.

In addition, the Christ came **to preach the truth**. Before going to Calvary to give Himself as a ransom, He first spent a few years proclaiming God's word, which is truth (John 17:17). Just before Pilate sentenced Jesus to death, He told the governor, “*For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth*” (John 18:38). Because Jesus wanted men to understand that only God's truth can make them free from sin (John 8:32), He propagated that truth.

Jesus' mission to earth also included **building His church**. That plan was in the mind of God before the creation of the world. Jesus promised to build His church (Matthew 16:18). Because of His great love for His church, He gave Himself for it (Ephesians 5:25), purchasing it with His precious blood (Acts 20:28). He is the Savior of His one body/church and serves as its Head (Ephesians 5:23). While Jesus now sits at His Father's right hand in heaven, on earth His church continues His mission of glorifying God and helping people prepare to go to heaven.

How blessed the human race is that Jesus came into the world! He came to save sinners, serve humans, preach the truth, and build His church. May we always appreciate all that He has done for us.

-- Roger D. Campbell

“DOCTRINE DOES NOT MATTER”

Religious people sometimes make statements like, “I don’t get into doctrine; I just teach about Jesus.” The meaning — whether implied or stated outright — is that the person will not deal with anything “controversial” or difficult, telling others “only about Jesus.” While we cannot know the heart of those who make such statements, we can know that such sentiments betray a definite ignorance as to what doctrine really is.

I have often told my children and often said in preaching, “Before using a word, it is essential to know what that word means.” Too many use words with little or no knowledge as to the words’ meaning. Some of us learned the hard way, using a word whose meaning we did not know, only to have Mom wash our mouths out with soap, sternly informing us that the word was not nice at all. That said, we need to understand what “doctrine” means.

Merriam-Webster’s online dictionary defines doctrine primarily as “a principle or position or the body of principles in a branch of knowledge or system of belief” (merriam-webster.com/dictionary/doctrine). That primary definition is probably why some have almost an aversion to the term, for it indicates a denominational concept of teaching a particular sect’s creed, dogma, etc. With that particular concept in mind, it is understandable for one to say, “I do not get into teaching a particular denomination’s creed. I just stick to teaching Jesus and the Bible.” That sentiment is good and needed. But, dictionaries give modern usage of a word and do not always agree with biblical usage. Relative to this word “doctrine,” it is not until the fifth definition that Merriam-Webster lists, “Something that is taught.” They add an “archaic” use of the word and define it as “teaching, instruction.” Yet, these two latter definitions perfectly describe the biblical usage of the word translated “doctrine(s)” in the New Testament (from the Greek words *didache* and *didaskalia*). In the New Testament, “doctrine” simply means teaching or instruction, whether the act or the thing taught (see *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* for full definitions).

Does doctrine matter, then? Understanding that the word means teaching/instruction, the answer is obvious: doctrine absolutely does matter! While it is good to avoid teaching denominational creeds and stick to the inspired instruction of, “*Preach the word*” (2 Timothy 4:2), we must realize that teaching anything at all is teaching doctrine, for doctrine *is* the teaching. Note a few applicable points from Scripture:

❖ **Jesus taught doctrine.** The people of His day

were “*astonished*” at His teaching (“doctrine,” KJV), for He taught with authority (Matthew 7:28,29; 22:33). Jesus also said His doctrine was not His own, but the Father’s (John 7:16). Other New Testament passages speak of doctrine which is God’s (1 Timothy 6:1; Titus 2:10) or “*accords with godliness*” (1 Timothy 6:3).

❖ **The faithful of the early church continued in the apostles’ doctrine (Acts 2:42).** Paul told the young evangelist Timothy, “*You have carefully followed my doctrine . . .*” (2 Timothy 3:10). Where did Paul get this “doctrine” he taught? Paul often stated that his doctrine/teaching was not from man, but from God (Galatians 1:1,11,12; 1 Corinthians 14:37; Ephesians 3:3), as did the apostle John (1 John 4:6). In pointing out the inspiration of the Scriptures by the Holy Spirit, Paul also declared that God’s word is profitable for, among other things, doctrine (2 Timothy 3:16). Christians are saved by obedience to the “*form of doctrine*” delivered (Romans 6:17), and John wrote by inspiration, “*He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son*” (2 John 9). Those walking contrary to the apostles’ doctrine are to be noted (“marked,” KJV) and avoided (Romans 16:17), and Paul told Timothy to charge the brethren to “*teach no other doctrine*” (1 Timothy 1:3).

❖ **Scripture speaks of sound (or good) doctrine.** Paul warned Timothy against things “*contrary to sound doctrine*” (1 Timothy 1:10) and referred other times to “*sound doctrine*” (2 Timothy 4:3; Titus 1:9; 2:1) and “*good doctrine*” (1 Timothy 4:6). Paul admonished the evangelist Titus, “*In all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility*” (Titus 2:7).

❖ **Scripture speaks of unsound (or wrong) doctrine.** Jesus spoke of those who worship God in vain, “*Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men*” (Matthew 15:9). Paul also warned against “*the commandments and doctrines of men*” (Colossians 2:22) and “*doctrines of demons*” (1 Timothy 4:1). He exhorted the Ephesians not to be “*tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine*” (Ephesians 4:14). And, the writer of Hebrews admonished brethren, “*Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines*” (Hebrews 13:9).

Does doctrine matter? In a word, “Yes!” The inspired apostle Paul exhorts, “*Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you*” (1 Timothy 4:16). Even considering just this verse alone, how could anyone conclude doctrine does not matter?

-- Chad Dollahite

How Jesus Dealt with a Certain Lawyer

We read about Jesus' encounter with this gentleman in Luke 10:25-37. In this case, the lawyer initiated a conversation about spiritual matters. It is written, "*And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, 'Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?'*" (Luke 10:25).

How wonderful that a person would ask about eternal life! Was he sincerely seeking to learn God's will? His response to the Master and his future life will demonstrate his attitude and commitment to the truth. You and I are blessed when we have people approach us to inquire about matters pertaining to the soul!

What can we observe in Jesus' dealings with this lawyer? When the man asked about eternal life, Jesus in turn asked him, "*What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?*" (10:26). What was the Master doing? Pointing to God's word as the standard of authority. If we are going to have a fruitful study with someone, we must point out to them that God's word is our sole standard of authority in all religious and moral matters. Regardless of the teaching method we use in a one-on-one study, early in the study we need to establish the authority of the Bible.

Second, Jesus believed in the man's ability to hear, reason, and understand (10:26). We need to take that same approach with people. God's appeal always has been to come and *reason* together (Isaiah 1:18).

Jesus gave the lawyer credit when he gave a right answer. When the man gave the correct response to Jesus' questions, He told him, "*You have answered rightly; do this and you will live*" (10:28). Jesus' words served as a positive reinforcement of the truth.

Fourth, Jesus used an illustration. To help the man see who his "neighbor" was, the Christ told the story which we call "The Parable of the Good Samaritan" (10:30-35). When you use earthly illustrations, make sure you use examples that people can understand.

What else? Jesus asked "open" questions. One of them was: "*So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?*" (10:36). Be prepared to use open questions to get a person engaged in the study and to reveal what he is thinking.

Finally, our Lord pointed to the man's personal responsibility to obey God's will. When the lawyer properly identified the one who acted as a neighbor in the story Jesus told, what did Jesus tell Him? "*Go and do likewise*" (10:37). That is what you call appealing to a prospect to make personal application to what he has learned. Learning without application is empty.

We need to imitate Jesus' evangelistic methods!

-- Roger D. Campbell

Ephesians 2:11-18 – Reconciliation and Unity through Jesus

This section of the Bible points out a vivid contrast: division versus unity. For identification purposes, the Jews sometimes were called "the Circumcision," while the Gentiles, that is, non-Jews, were called "the Uncircumcision" (Ephesians 2:11). Whether intentional or not, such nomenclature seemed to accentuate the division between the two parties.

The Israelites had been designated the chosen people of God. Before God's Son came into the world, the Gentiles were on the outside looking in, without God, without the Christ, and without hope (2:12).

Between the Gentiles and Jews stood a "*wall of separation*" (2:14). Before the Messiah came in the flesh, in general, there were no pleasant associations between the Jews and non-Jews. The law of Moses stood as a separator: the Israelites were committed to following it, but the Gentiles were not. Enmity kept the Gentiles and Jews apart from one another (2:15).

In His infinite wisdom, God had a plan to bring the Jews and Gentiles together. How could that ever be accomplished? Through His Son. Gentiles were "*brought near by the blood of Christ*" (2:13). Jesus serves as peace . . . a peace offering, so to speak, to get Jews and Gentiles together (2:14).

The Christ "*has made both one*" (2:14). In the context, the word "both" points to Gentiles and Jews. From the two, He has created "*in Himself one new man*" (2:15). The "new man" is a new person in the Christ, called a "Christian" (2 Corinthians 5:17). Racial and biological distinctions still exist, but in the Christ, Jewish and Gentile Christians are one family, the children of God (Galatians 3:26-28).

On the one hand, through the cross Jesus reconciled Gentiles and Jews *to one another*. By that same cross, He also reconciled them both *to God* (2:16). It is clear that being reconciled to God was an individual, conditional matter, as was the once-separated Jews' and Gentiles' reconciliation to each other. The reconciliation of any parties, who for any reason have been at odds with one another, can be brought about only when they accept the gospel and treat one another as equal members in God's family.

A big factor in the unity among first-century Jewish and Gentile saints was the fact that Jesus abolished the law of commandments, that is, the law of Moses (2:15). He was a promoter and preacher of peace (2:17) — the Prince of Peace provided the *gospel of peace* (6:15) to bring folks into His *kingdom of peace* (Romans 14:17), leading to *eternal peace*.

-- Roger D. Campbell

What Christians Do — EXHORT ONE ANOTHER

Some people are what we would call private people: people who do not share their thoughts and emotions with others. Others are like an open book. They want to tell anyone within hearing distance exactly what they are thinking. Whether you fall into one camp or the other (or you are a mixture of both), the Bible is clear that we have to interact with others.

One way that we can achieve this is by exhorting one another. In fact, God clearly says through His word that to exhort one another is something that we *must* do. We do not use the word exhort very much in modern language, so it would certainly benefit us to consider this word's impact on Christians.

When we say we should exhort someone, it can sound like something that is uncomfortable or negative. However, the word simply means to encourage or to urge by a strong argument. This is not nitpicking or judging one's every action. But we can be a Christian who strengthens our brothers and sisters as we journey together towards a heavenly home.

As is usually the case, God does not leave us on our own to figure out how exhortation works. As we search the Scriptures, we find several patterns of exhortation, places where exhortation takes place, and its great purpose.

Patterns – Paul made it part of his life's work to encourage brethren with whom he came in contact. He told the Christians in Thessalonica, "*You are witnesses, and God also . . . how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children*" (1 Thessalonians 2:10-12). Paul did not just tell Christians to exhort one another; he took every opportunity to set the example.

As Paul references exhorting the brethren, he also mentions comforting and charging them. Our interactions with each other should neither be all positive nor all negative. And all of this, Paul says, is done for the purpose of helping Christians "*walk worthy of God*" (1 Thessalonians 2:12).

Barnabas is another pattern who shows us the value of exhorting one another. His name literally means Son of Encouragement/Exhortation (Acts 4:36). In Acts 9:27, he exhorts Paul by standing with him when others are afraid of Paul because of his past of persecuting Christians. In Acts 11:22-24, he exhorts Christians who are being persecuted.

Then in Acts 14:21,22, Paul and Barnabas combine to make a powerful team of exhortation. After preaching in Derbe, they travel back through three towns which they had previously visited: Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch.

This might not seem like a big deal until you consider the persecution they had faced in these places, especially Antioch and Lystra. Why would these men face such a challenge? Simply put: to exhort. Exhorting fellow Christians is not a one-time job. It must continue. Paul and Barnabas exhorted them "*to continue in the faith*" (Acts 14:22).

Places – As is the case with many instructions in the Bible, God intends for exhorting others to be practiced in the home. Parents can model the will of God by exhorting their children and each other.

Another place where Christians can put this into practice is in the worship assembly. The Holy Spirit, through the pen of the Hebrews writer, specifically says that Christians should, "*consider one another . . . not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together . . . but exhorting one another*" (Hebrews 10:24,25). Our attendance and participation in worship is one way that we can exhort one another.

It also is important that Christians practice exhorting one another in their personal relationships. This can be difficult at times, especially if the encouragement given is for one to turn from sin. This exhortation is not always well-received. But, this practice is one way that we fulfill the law of Christ (Galatians 6:1,2).

Purpose – There is also a great purpose that the Hebrews writer gives us for exhorting one another: "*But exhort one another daily, while it is called 'Today,' lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin*" (Hebrews 3:13). Every Christian continues to battle the weakness of the flesh and strives not to be a slave to sin. No Christian remains perfect once he has been buried in baptism and raised to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4). Thus, it is of great importance that brethren exhort and encourage one another in order to avoid becoming hardened to this world of sin. Without daily encouragement, Christians can begin to believe the lies of the devil!

May we learn from the patterns given to us by Paul and Barnabas. May we practice exhorting one another in our homes, in our worship assemblies, and in our relationships. And, may we continue to exhort one another as we strive together to remain faithful.

-- Joel Danley

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