

Come, Follow Jesus to the Cross: Friends Don't Let Friends Die Without Jesus!

A sermon based on John 4:31-38

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

How much do you love your friends? There's probably a lot you'd be willing to do for them. I'd guess making sure they're safe would be one of those things. Well, maybe you've heard of the campaign, "Friends Don't Let Friends Drink And Drive," meant to prevent drunk driving.

Why would there be such an attraction in that campaign? Because you know how dangerous it can be to get in a car and drive if your faculties have been impaired by alcohol. I would want my friend to be in a situation where his risk of losing his life would be severely heightened, and you wouldn't, either. Same as if you saw your friend taking drugs, you'd try to seek help for them. If they were going to jump off a bridge, you'd do everything in your power to keep them from injuring themselves or even worse. We love them enough to care about their safety.

But is it only their physical safety we care about? Is that where we draw the line? The truth is, there seems to be a disconnect behind our concern for a friend's physical health and their spiritual health. Why is that? Shouldn't we care more about a person's eternity than about the temporary? We should...because true Friends Don't Let Friends Die Without Jesus.

Now, over the last few weeks, we've been talking about our journey to the cross and our journey beyond that, to following Jesus throughout our entire lives.

First of all, the only way we're even able to be on that journey is because of Jesus, who chose us, who saved us, and who made us his own by giving us the gift of saving faith in him. But there's more to our individual walk. Last week, we saw how it involves a cross, that we have to expect to undergo our own pain and suffering, hardship and temptation as a result of faith in Jesus. But the good news? We don't have to carry the burden of our sins because that was Jesus' cross, lovingly carried for us! And that pretty much sums up our journey, right?

Well, really, to just stop there, focusing on ourselves and on our journey alone would be a gross misunderstanding of who Jesus has made us to be and the mission he has commanded of us. Because doesn't Jesus tell us, **"You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a people belonging to God, THAT YOU MAY declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light"**? He does. Doesn't Jesus tell us, **"You will be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth"**? He does. Doesn't Jesus tell us, **"Go and make disciples of all nations,"** and **"Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation"**? He does.

Our journey includes a proclamation to others of the good news of salvation, that Jesus lived, Jesus died, and Jesus rose for the sins of the whole world, and to do it eagerly, just like the shepherds who visited the newborn Christ, who couldn't contain themselves and their excitement but exploded with their glad tidings to everyone they met, whether they would listen or not.

But even better than their example is our account today...of the greatest evangelist to ever live. His words to us today come on the heels of an awesome outreach opportunity Jesus grabbed hold of, sharing the good news about him, with a Samaritan woman at the well. Now, she was a perceived enemy, not even a friend of Jesus (because Jesus was a Jew, and the Jews and Samaritans hated each

other), but look at how much Jesus loved her and how he treated her even though she didn't deserve it, what with the sexual promiscuous life she was living.

He shouldn't have even been talking to her, and yet, in love, he gave her what she needed the most, living water...the news that the bringer of salvation was seated next to her. That's being a friend!

Well, then the disciples came, wanted Jesus to eat, but Jesus didn't want food. He had an insatiable hunger for doing God's will. And he told us what that will was. Do you get the point of his harvest picture? There are souls out there, in his time, and in ours, who are ripe for the picking...precious souls who don't know Jesus but who need to hear about Jesus...souls whom God wants picked and plucked for his heavenly family.

And who are the workers? That's right, you, me, every believer in Christ. We've been handpicked by God to go and gather in the harvest for his eternal storeroom. It doesn't matter your age, your gender, your situation in life, the Master has called you, his worker, to bring in his harvest, to work in your own personal mission field.

So, are you doing work worth your wages? Or in other words, are you working your mission fields? Are you showing people the way to the cross? If Jesus, our foreman, were to return right now and ask for an accounting of your work in actively proclaiming the good news about him with people who don't know him, what would you have to show? Slim pickings? Bushels and bushels full?

I would venture to say that for all of us, it probably wouldn't be even close to what we would want to be showing for our outreach efforts. Is that a fair assumption? Even amongst our friends, whom we deeply care about, the same friends we wouldn't let drive home from the bar out of concern about their physical safety, what do we have to show for being concerned about their spiritual safety?

Why the disconnect between the temporal and physical and the eternal and spiritual? We can talk about all the reasons and excuses why I can't go, why I don't go, why I won't go after them and win them for Jesus, and we'll discuss a lot of those next week. But right now, let's focus on the one Jesus brings up in our text. Can you see it? **"Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest?'"**

Doesn't that sound a lot like, "Well, there's always tomorrow. I can tell them about Jesus tomorrow. I can find a way to share the gospel with them tomorrow. I can go and start working in my mission field tomorrow."

But what happens when there is no tomorrow. This past Sunday Ryan, a classmate who was a year behind me at the Seminary, died after a sudden and quick bout with melanoma cancer. No one was expecting it. What had started out as mole a year ago, swiftly taken care of, and the test came back clear. But just a year later, a routine checkup showed it had come back and had aggressively attacked the spleen, liver, bones, and what was a prognosis of at least six months left was a couple of days. We could say, "But he was too young!" But it's all God's timing, and we don't know when it ends. I praise God that Ryan had already been reaped for him and is standing securely at God's side in heaven.

But what happens when there's no tomorrow for your friend who doesn't know Jesus? Maybe that's already happened to you. We can't comfort ourselves with the notion, "Well, he/she, lived a good life, was a genuinely nice, good person, lived the kind of life that Jesus would want them to. I believe he/she is in heaven."

Well, what does the Bible say is needed for heaven? Good works, a good life? No. **“Whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” “Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.”** How can I know if that friend believed if I never saw him in church, I never heard him talk about his faith or Jesus, I never talked to him about Jesus? What happens when there’s no tomorrow?

Jesus says, **“I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.”** The time is now! The need to share Jesus is now! The harvest can’t wait.

Any farmer knows that. I grew up with farms and fields surrounding my house. Farmers won’t wait. As soon as the weather allows, they’re out there, working around the clock to get fields seeded. And once the harvest is ripe, they don’t run into town, hit up the local bar, and toast their future bounty.

No, they get out there, and they work...and they work...and they work until the fields are completely harvested. It doesn’t matter how long it takes. If they have to spend 48 hours gathering their crop, you can guarantee from the moment they start, they will not have stopped until 48 hours when they worked non-stop, even in the dark of the night, to finish their harvest.

Do you know why? What happens if they wait too long? Bad weather, pests, even just time could ruin their crop, turn it rotten. What will happen if you let your personal mission field lie unharvested, if we don’t have that sense of urgency in gathering our friends, for that matter, every soul for Jesus? What happens when there’s no tomorrow? The Bible tells us the sad reality, **“[The Lord Jesus] will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power.”**

Surely none of you would want that for your friends, for anyone in this world to have to endure, being cast out from Jesus’ presence and in the fires of hell for all eternity.

So, what’s the solution? It’s the same solution Jesus carried out in his ministry. If you look at the beginning of the account of the Samaritan women at the well, the beginning of this chapter, you see the answer in one short phrase, “He had to go through Samaria.” He HAD TO GO.

Could Jesus have found a different route to take to avoid having to travel through Samaria and avoid his “enemies”? Yeah, he could have. But he wouldn’t. Why would he? He said about himself, **“The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”** So here was someone who was lost, she wasn’t even his friend, and yet he cared about her. He wanted to save her...he had to save her. So he did what it took.

Just like Jesus did what it took to save us. We weren’t even his friends, either, but in love for us, Jesus did what had to be done. He lived. He died. He rose. He saw a field of all people of all time, ripe for harvest, and he would not let us rot and die and go to hell. So he lived the perfect life, gave that perfect life up on the cross and took our sins instead and died for them, and he rose from the grave to finish off the greatest story ever told. The farmer who saved us from being thrown into the fire for no other reason than he loves us and cares about us. And for that reason, he had to go...and he did.

The greatest story ever told, the gospel, and it’s our precious treasure! But we, like Jesus, have to go and harvest the crop. We, like Jesus, have to go and share the same good news with precious souls who don’t know Jesus. You understand why don’t you? The book of Romans tells us, **“How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have**

not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?" That's where we are needed. We have the precious antidote that can save people from eternal death. We have the good news of the gospel that souls need to hear in order for the Holy Spirit to create faith.

And the harvest is now! Now, you notice Jesus talks about being either a sower or a reaper in our verses. Do you get the difference between the two? The sower plants the seed; the reaper harvests the crop.

You might be one or the other or both. You might be the one who plants the seed of the gospel, telling your friend about Jesus for the very first time or even repeatedly. Not always the most fun job, as the sower does some of the hardest work and doesn't always see the harvest. You might be the reaper, the one who continues to patiently share Jesus, and see the gospel take root and the Holy Spirit work faith in hearts and be able to rejoice when a soul is won for Christ's kingdom.

My guess is that most of us can be a hybrid of both. Regardless of which you might be, do you see where we are? We have to be in the fields. We have to be doing the work because tomorrow's right around the corner, and we don't know when a person's life will end, and I care about my friends too much to let them die without Jesus, and I know you do, too.

So, what's keeping us on the sidelines? Don't be content to stand there. The hymn we sang shares the urgency, **"Fields are ripe...harvests waiting...let none hear you idly saying, "There is nothing I can do," while the multitudes are dying...take the task he gives you gladly...answer quickly when he calleth, "Here am I, send me, send me!"**

Just doing the work refreshes our souls because the Savior wants us to do it, and we want what he wants. So friends, don't let your friends die without Jesus. We have to share the gospel with them...we want to. And when Jesus allows us to see the harvest, we rejoice! Amen.