

We Are Witnesses of These Things
"Then Go Quickly"
Matthew 28:7

Prepared by Pastor Mark L. Walker

Without a doubt, the pace of the world can only be described as rapid. Through the means of a worldwide information highway, news can travel across the globe with the speed in which it occurs. Satellites, the Internet, cellular phones, FAX machines, CD-ROM and other hightech communication devices have helped to make the world smaller and faster.

Such technological advances have attempted to meet the need for information to be communicated swiftly. There seems to be a growing desire to send and receive data as rapidly as possible. The underlying sentiment in society is that time is limited and pertinent information must be shared with expediency. *There is no time to waste.*

In essence, this is the message behind the words spoken by the angel at the tomb of the resurrected Jesus Christ when he instructed two of Christ's followers to "*go quickly and tell His disciples: 'He has risen from the dead. . .'*" (Matthew 28:7, NIV). The message could not wait, it had to be made known immediately. There was no time to waste.

The Charge

The charge given by the angel was to go *quickly*, meaning to move hastily, speedily, shortly and immediately. It was to be done with a sense of suddenness and urgency.

Urgency has seemed to always surround the ministry and message of the gospel. The shepherds felt it after they encountered the angelic hosts proclaiming the birth of Jesus Christ, so they "*hurried off*" to find the baby (Luke 2:16, NIV). Jesus Christ knew the

urgency of His ministry when He declared that *"as long as it is day, we must do the work of Him who sent Me. Night is coming, when no one can work"* (John 9:4, NIV).

Urgency is emphasized in Christ's parable of the Great Banquet when the master tells the servant, *"Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame. . . Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house may be full"* (Luke 14:21,23; NIV).

Paul stressed this point to Timothy when he instructed him to *"fan into flame the gift of God. . . to do the work of an evangelist, to discharge all the duties of your ministry"* (II Timothy 1:6; 4:5, NIV). Why? There was work to be done before the sudden return of Jesus Christ.

The reason a charge has been given to spread the gospel quickly, is because no one knows the day or hour (Matthew 24:36); Jesus Christ will come when mankind least expects Him (Luke 12:40); His return is imminent (Philippians 4:5); the Judge is at the door (James 5:9); and God wants none to perish (II Peter 3:9).

Church history reflects the urgent spreading of the gospel. The July/August 1995 issue of "The Mission Frontiers" (Bulletin of the U.S. Center for World Missions), published the following ratios of unbelievers to believers on the earth from AD 100 to AD

1992:

- AD 100 - 360 unbelievers/1 believer
- AD 1000 - 220 unbelievers/1 believer
- AD 1500 - 69 unbelievers/1 believer
- AD 1900 - 27 unbelievers/1 believer
- AD 1950 - 21 unbelievers/1 believer
- AD 1980 - 11 unbelievers/1 believer
- AD 1992 - 7 unbelievers/1 believer

The article went on to say that out of the 5.7 billion people in the world today, 600 million are Bible-believing Christians. This reflects an expansion in the Kingdom of God at over three times the rate of the world's population growth.

Through the medium of satellite television, world radio, audio cassette, film, and printed multi-language scriptures, the gospel has been able to penetrate more areas within the past three decades than in any other time in Church history. Hightech communication has done wonders to meet the urgent need to proclaim the gospel.

These modes of media will continue to be key in the last days of proclaiming the gospel around the world. This calls for the church to constantly evaluate its involvement in the propagation of the gospel via the media. The church must be sure to do its part to allocate an appropriate portion of its resources for assisting the promotion of Christ's message over the airwaves.

The charge to go quickly, requires it.

The Commission

As helpful as mass media is and will be in getting the good news out, it is still not the most effective means of evangelism. The book, The Master's Plan For Making Disciples, by Win and Charles Arn, states that only *one percent* of those in church are there as a result of an evangelistic crusade or television outreach (p. 43). This makes sense when statistics from a recent survey conducted in America by George Barna indicate that born again Christians (66%) are almost twice as likely to watch Christian television than Non-Christians (36%). The survey also revealed that born again Christians (59%) listen to Christian teaching and preaching on the radio more than Non-Christians (26%) (What

Americans Believe, p. 127, 133).

The most effective form of evangelism is the person to person witness of every Christian. Studies indicate that 75% - 90% of the people active in church today are the result of a personal relationship with another believer (The Master's Plan For Making Disciples, Win and Charles Arn, p.43).

The angel of God gave a *personal commission* to the two Mary's. They were to go to the disciples in person and deliver the good news. An individual's personal witness remains the most impactful means of communicating the gospel.

God's word admonishes the individual believer to be a "*workman. . .who correctly handles the word of truth*" (II Timothy 2:15, NIV), to "*be prepared in season and out of season*" (II Timothy 4:2, NIV), and to "*always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have*" (I Peter 3:15, NIV). In other words, know why one believes what they believe and be ready, able and willing to share that belief.

Both women "*hurried away*" (vs. 8) to be witnesses to the truth they had experienced. Three observations can be drawn from this account concerning the way one is to go.

They Went Confidently - The angel and Jesus Christ encouraged the women not to be afraid (vs. 5,10). Fear is perhaps the number one reason people lack a personal witness. The fear of rejection, of failing, of embarrassing oneself, of what to say and how to say it, all play a part in immobilizing Gods witnesses.

This places a great responsibility upon the church to provide consistent and adequate

The exuberant joy of Mary Magdalene and the other Mary affirmed that their story was true. The disciples could try to find holes in their story and attempt to explain away the women's claim, but they could not ignore the genuine change in their lives. It convinced the disciples to look further into the truth.

The continued transformed life of the believer is the ultimate difference between someone drawing closer to or withdrawing further away from Christ. Every Christian is called to a greater responsibility of living through unveiled faces the reflection of the Lord's glory and *"being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory. . ."* (II Corinthians 3:18, NIV).

They Went Compelled - The women *"ran"* to tell the news. They were compelled to move with haste. The news was too great and the time too urgent to be slow in making the truth known. There was no other option, but to run.

The news is too great and the times too urgent for the church to be slow in making the truth known. With the intense efforts to penetrate the **10/40 Window**, which many believe to be the only area of the world unreached with the gospel, the words of Jesus Christ are on the verge of being fulfilled, *"And this gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations and then the end will come"* (Matthew 24:14, NIV, emphasis mine).

The *AD 2000 Movement* estimates that there are 11,000 remaining unreached people groups and 7 million Bible-believing congregations around the world, calculating a ratio of 600 congregations for one unreached people group. Currently, congregations have adopted two-thirds of the unreached people groups and the goal of AD 2000 is to adopt and begin

reaching them all by December 31, 2000 (Missions Frontier, Bulletin of the U.S. Center for World Missions, July-August, 1995). The vision is "*A Church for Every People and the Gospel for Every Person by the Year 2000.*"

Such statistics indicate the time is short, calling every believer to recognize the responsibility the Lord has placed into their hands. Paul understood this responsibility.

Paul wrote that the love of Christ compelled him for he was "*convinced that one died for all*" (II Corinthians 5:14, NIV). He believed the "*ministry of reconciliation*" was given to him by God and that God had therefore committed to him the responsibility of proclaiming the "*message of reconciliation*" (II Corinthians 5:18-19, NIV). He took this so seriously that he considered himself an ambassador for Christ and literally believed that God made His gospel appeal through Paul to others (II Corinthians 5:20).

The people of God have been entrusted with the good news of Jesus Christ. Every disciple has the awesome task of making that news known. If nothing else, this responsibility alone should compel each believer to do his or her part to help prepare as many as possible for the return of Jesus Christ.

The Called

The only way the unchurched community can be reached is for the *called out community* to respond to the charge and commission. The first group to be told that Jesus Christ was alive were the disciples. They had to be convinced of the message of hope, before they could convince anyone else.

When individual members of a called out community live out the truth of Jesus Christ, gaining confidence, encountering life-change and becoming compelled by the

gospel, then together they see a revival that results in transformed people and places. Acts 2:42-49 describes the community life of the early church. They believed the scriptures, prayed and worshipped together, enjoyed one another, loved each other, gave generously and the result was that *"the Lord added to their numbers daily those who were being saved"* (vs. 49, NIV). The sincere lifestyle of a group of people changed by Jesus Christ was a natural appeal to the unbelieving community.

Jim Petersen writes in his book, Living Proof, that the collective body of Christ is essential to the witnessing process. He states that just by the mere fact that a *"group exists, with its unique ability to love one another, is in itself a powerful statement to the world. It is a testimony to the reality of our message: we are a transformed people; Jesus was truly sent by the Father; and there is hope for anybody"* (p. 129).

In fact, Petersen asserts that without the witness of the body of believers, evangelism is incomplete. The most convincing witness, according to Petersen, contains three influences, *"our lives, the band of kindred spirits of which we are a part, and our words"* (p. 130). All three must be sustained until the person trying to be won to Jesus Christ, accepts Him and moves into discipleship.

The church can never lose sight of its integral role in the ministry of evangelism. Evangelism is the planned activity of a discipling, called out, missionary community. Unless the corporate body sees themselves first and foremost as living witnesses, then the evangelism ministry of the church is greatly weakened.

An individual's personal witness, both in words and lifestyle, remains strong, focused, and effective only within the context of being a part of a people who consider

themselves called to display a message of eternal hope. Peter said it best, "*You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light*" (I Peter 2:9, NIV, emphasis mine).

There is no time to waste. The need to communicate Christ's life-changing message is greater than ever before. The success of the charge and commission rests in the lives of the called. God's people must move quickly, because the risen Lord whom the angel spoke about has said, "*Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me to give to every one according to his work*" (Revelation 22:12, NKJV, emphasis mine). Since it is still day, then go quickly!

(Prepared by Pastor Mark L. Walker and presented on the Mount Paran Church of God Elder's Retreat, March 15-17, 1996)