

Awaken – Acts 24-26

We Are Custodians of the Message Even When...

February 10, 2008

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I have babies on the brain right now. I believe this is the case for several obvious reasons. We are expecting our third in a couple months, but we are working through all of the preparations of adding another to our home. We have added furniture, painted, and reorganized. When you stop and think about it, having children is a pretty humbling experience. God blesses you with a life, a creation of his design to reflect his glory. He blesses us with this incredible creation as stewards or custodians of a life on behalf of his desires. He creates life with a very specific purpose and design and then he places it in our hands to love, raise, and train to be the person that he/she was created to be. When you look at it like this, in spiritual terms, you realize how trusting it is of the Father to place such an intimate work of his hands in ours.

As most all of you know, our Father in heaven has a Son. He has a Son who, in a way we will never understand, has always been. His Son was with him at creation as a mediator through which creation was accomplished according to John 1. In early chapters of Genesis we read about the sin that entered the world through Adam and Eve. Eve ate something that she was told not to eat by God and Adam was right there, not leading in the way that should have been. This first sin that took place by Adam caused an inheritance of sin to fall on all of mankind that came after him. Romans 5:12 is the biblical text that describes this to us, "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned."

The only way to atone for this sin that had spread as an inheritance to all men was for an ultimate sacrifice to take place. There needed to be an ultimate sacrifice that made right all of the wrong that had been inherited. This act that we refer to as the atonement – we will actually be doing an entire series on this beginning Easter Sunday. But, in a very brief way, this act consisted of the Father sending his only son to live among men. He came and was born to a poor unwed couple. He lived a sinless life which all led to his horrible death on the cross. He died the worst death imaginable and he died so that you and I might experience a true, real relationship with him. He died taking our sin and paying our debt so that we might have a debt free standing before the Father. He died for the sins that I have committed. He died in my place.

These historical events that I have described to you are often times referred to as the gospel. The gospel just means good news and the good news is that someone else, Jesus Christ, paid your sin debt and no matter how hard you or I would have worked, we would never have been able to pay it ourselves. This story – this gospel – is a story that the Father has given us as stewards or custodians. This message and this reality of all that took place on the cross has been placed in our care much in the same way that our children have.

Just as I do, all of you who have children love them very much. You will probably do absolutely anything for your children. I hope you are humbled as I am that the creator of the universe has blessed you with his own creation that you call Christian, Nikki, Braxton,

or Kendall. As hard as this might be to understand, don't you think that it even took more of him to place the care of this great story, the story of his son, in your care as the custodian of it? How do you think he feels about the way we have handled our job as stewards of this story – as stewards of his only son?

If you have not embraced the story of Jesus that I just described, then you have a lot to chew on right now. I would love to tell you how you might begin this journey of knowing Christ in a personal and intimate way. It is a journey that you begin to walk and a relationship that you begin to embrace. It is not some magic words that speak aloud – it is a heart and soul issue. But, the rest of you here, if you don't fit inside that box then you probably have some type of relationship with this one that died. If you do, you are custodians of his story and his Father has placed that story in your hands to carry to your next door neighbor, your co-worker, your mom, dad, brother, sister, your boss, and your friend. He has placed this precious story in our hands and has blessed us as carriers of this message.

Many of you probably feel like I do and you feel a little tired or beat up. Maybe you have felt enough resistance to this story from people over time that you no longer have the spiritual energy that it takes to make yourself vulnerable as the messenger any longer. I enjoy listening to sermons during the week. It is the way that I get fed often times since I do not have the opportunity that you have to sit and listen to the Bible being taught each week. One of the pastors that I was listening to this week talked about how many preachers begin the book of Acts and then do not finish it. He was saying that it gets so repetitive and exhausting that many churches never finish the book. Although we are moving through these final chapters quickly, I think we need to experience these themes that surface during these chapters. Paul is more exhausted spiritually than you and I will ever be or understand. Paul is tired and hurt but he continues to stay aware of his role as custodian of the great story of Jesus Christ.

As we fly through these scenes in Paul's life, I want us to be reminded that we are stewards of the message of Jesus Christ **even when we are opposed, when we have said it before and when we don't experience results, and even when it gets personal.**

- We are stewards of his story even when we are opposed. **READ 24:1-21**
- We are stewards of the story even when we have said it before and when we don't experience results. **READ vs. 24-27; 25:13ff; 26:1ff; 26:12ff**
- We are stewards of the story even when we it gets personal. **READ 26:19-24**

Some of you work in the sales arena, and those of you who do would agree that you can approach your work in different ways. All of us know the type of salesmen that we avoid when we see them coming. You know that there is very little to zero compassion for you, but rather there are quotas or numbers to reach and you are the next number to be reported as a success. Maybe you have heard the phrase, "what is it going to take to get you in this car today?" Or heck, maybe you have even been surfing through the television channels and heard, "if you give sacrificially to this ministry, the address on the bottom of your screen, you will be blessed beyond your wildest dreams." Friends, we are not called

to be Jesus salesmen. Although, this is the way that is described often times, this is not what God desires for us to do. If we were to be Jesus salesmen then it would be up to us to close the deal. Guys, there is no “closing the deal” when it comes to our role as stewards and custodians of the gospel story.

I have this quote in the back of my Bible, “May the Spirit of Christ empower you to love and serve your neighbors, welcome them into your lives, homes, schedules and hearts, so that through belonging they may discover the joys of believing and becoming.” In God’s own fun sense of humor, I was putting the finishing touches on this message at Dunn Bros sitting next to two guys making cold calls to restaurants around the Katy area. For several hours I overheard their conversations and phone calls with restaurant owners throughout the area. Each of them would switch off and make a call and then after completing the call, as you might expect, they would talk about the completed call. All of the conversation, every single word of it, revolved around what the possible client could do for them.

If our motive for telling someone about what Christ did on the cross is to accomplish something for ourselves, then we have completely missed the boat. However, if our response to our charge as custodians of gospel is keeping it to ourselves, then we are missing the boat. God has given us this story to cherish it and invite others on this journey with us. Instead of thinking that it is our job to sell people on the reality of Jesus, what if we invited people into our lives? What if someone new comes into your place of work and you take the initiative to show him or her compassion. What if you invited them to dinner with you and another couple and began a relationship with them? What if you took the next step with a guy or gal you have worked with for a while and connected with him outside of work? What if you slowed down for a moment when you grab that morning coffee to get to know who is behind the counter? God’s ultimate desire for you and I is not to close a deal by convincing someone to pray a prayer. God wants us to be so in love with him that when we let people into our lives we are letting them into our spiritual lives.

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### SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Could you describe how your walk with Christ began? (*Facilitators, we are not looking for a moment in time... So, try not to make people feel like they have to give you a date. Rather, we just want to hear people's testimony... Hopefully this will deepen the relationships in the group.*)
2. What thoughts come to your mind when you hear the word "evangelism"? Why is it that those thoughts come to your mind?
3. Do you have any shaping experiences, either positive or negative, regarding sharing your faith?
4. Have you ever felt any of the things we saw Paul go through – opposition, repetition without reward, or personal backlash?
5. What are some of the difficulties of investing in people and establishing real relationships? (*It takes a lot of effort and is very exhausting to build a relationship...*)
6. Matt read this quote on Sunday morning, "May the Spirit of Christ empower you to love and serve your neighbors, welcome them into your lives, homes, schedules, and hearts, so that through belonging they may discover they joys of believing and becoming." Can you share some ideas about how this type of picture might look in your lives? (*Neighbors can be many different types of people – neighbors as in coworkers or geographic neighbors, etc...*)
7. If I asked you to write down 5 names that you are praying for and trying to welcome into your life, home, schedule, and heart, could you do it? (*This kind of question will probably be followed by an awkward silence and that is fine. Maybe you could challenge each couple on their ride home to discuss who that is in their lives might be placed there for this very reason.*)