

Accepted and Usual

Wayne Waibel – 05/22/2022

Jesus is preparing His disciples for what their life will be without Him, and informing them of what is to come. While they hear the message, none of them is truly grasping the reality. How could they? This Jesus has not only showed them what a remarkable Man He is, their own inadequacies are exposed as well, so they have zero confidence in themselves.

In this scenario a Divine Initiative is beginning to form out of the smoke and confusion. What may have driven it from the very beginning is that the deepest longing of the human heart is to know with assurance the loving, living, and abiding presence of God. Jesus instills that assurance in His beloved disciples in spades.

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Of this they are quite certain. Jesus is love incarnate, and mirrors the Father. An important first step is established. They are intimately aware that nothing can separate them from the love of God the Father through the life of His Son Jesus Christ. Now they are ready to accept the next level which dictates that authentic mission is always a response to a need within the community, not simply the missionary's need to proclaim.

There are a plethora of modern missionaries who could benefit from that discipline. Just have a look at what passes as religion on YouTube sometime.

Even in the first century – it was a big world out there and the disciples were not going to be equipped to go toe to toe with it. Imperial Rome was a formidable opponent, so they needed a completely different track.

For them - the mission had to be a reconciling ministry. One that embraced peoples and nations of other faiths – not merely tolerate them. At the front end of their mission was the reality that they were blessed in order to bless others.

Faithfulness in human action will lead to an experience of divine indwelling. Love is the currency of faithfulness, and where love is, Jesus and the Father are at home.

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If you were to be plopped down in the middle of ancient Rome, how would you respond to the understanding that you were in the midst of a ruthless empire whose only initiative was world domination? I don't even need to give you time to think about that. It's a horrific proposition – and yet – here we are.

We live in the only nation that polices the world through five global military commands; maintains more than a million men and women at arms on four continents; deploys carrier battle groups on watch in every ocean; guarantees the survival of countries from Israel to South Korea; drives the wheels of global trade and commerce; and fills the hearts and minds of an entire planet with its dreams and desires.

Nowhere is the need for divine intervention greater than within the American Empire. Revelation warns us of the Roman and Babylonian Empires, and by implication – all empires. But today – in this country – if you use the word empire in the halls of the nation’s political arenas, I bet not a single person would take offense.

We are a nation of good people. I do believe that. Unfortunately – we have allowed our institutions to do our sinning for us. And those institutions have successfully hijacked God for their imperial designs.

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Paul’s first convert in Europe was a woman named Lydia. She was an impressive individual. She was the head of her household at a time when women were essentially thought of as property. She prospered in a city of some import within Imperial Rome.

Philippi was founded by Philip of Macedon who was the father of Alexander the Great. It remained an insignificant village until Emperor Augustus rediscovered it and found it to be an ideal spot for his Army officers to retire to.

By Paul's time – it had become a metropolis of fifteen thousand. The breakdown was typical of Roman centers of commerce. Three percent were elite; twenty five percent were land owning farmers and pensioned colonists; forty five percent were skilled workers, merchants and service providers - leaving twenty seven percent of the population as poor, of which roughly twenty percent were slaves.

Into this world, Paul was taking the gospel and this gospel was resonating with folks like Lydia. While Paul was conducting his ministry, the church was also going through changes. By in large the synagogues were not a welcoming place for the fledgling Christian faith, so they began to worship in homes. This became accepted and usual.

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The main points that Jesus was driving home in His Farewell Discourse were all centered around a growing movement toward the understanding that love in action was the closest we come to evidence of God.

Christ's exhortation that "If you love Me, you will do what I say," provides not only a directive, but also a promise. If we love Jesus, we cannot help but do what He says, and following the Master should be our primary focus.

When God is present, peace is made manifest. And Christ gives the kind of peace that the world cannot give – or take away. The peace that Jesus gives is the consequence of the presence of God.

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So we are stuck in the middle of a kingdom trying not to be imperial in nature, but who are we kidding. Our institutions have become so unwieldy that the humanness is factored out of them in the names of utility, efficiency, and prosperity. What was once alarming and rare has become accepted and usual. We stand on the brink of destroying the only planet most of us will ever call home, and yet – there is a bright light of hope.

It's really nothing new or revolutionary. It's the same message that has been offered for eons. "My peace I give to you." And it is a peace that transcends our understanding because it is so far beyond any glory we can bring to mind. It is a peace that transcends human history and forces it to bend toward justice.

On my way to work on September 11, 2001, I was overcome like most Americans, with the desire for justice in the form of vengeance. I couldn't help myself. My way of life had been assaulted by faceless and nameless cowards who chose to make their point by eliminating thousands of innocent people. Unacceptable.

Something else was competing for my attention that day. An almost imperceptible little voice was trying to be heard. Two words kept getting louder and louder and through the flood of emotion that was unleashed as a result of the events of that day, a very clear message was being written on my heart.

I resolved to retire to a world that contained hope – even in the midst of the American Empire. My humanity was rescued then, and is driven now by two words that have elevated my initial hope to a life of servitude in ministry. And those two words? Peace – Always - period. Amen.