

# THE HEART OF THE MATTER

(2 Timothy 2:8-13)

Ted Schroder, June 20, 2010

An advertisement for *Jesus Manifesto: It's Time to Restore the Supremacy of Jesus Christ*, a new book by Leonard Sweet and Frank Viola states:

“What is Christianity? It is Christ. Nothing more, nothing less. Christianity is not an ideology and not a philosophy. Christianity is the good news that beauty, truth and goodness are found in a Person. And conversion? It's more than a change of direction; it's a change in connection. It is with these issues that the authors feel a massive disconnect in today's church. Their response? This manifesto emphasizes ten crucial areas of restoring the supremacy of Jesus Christ, noting:

- Christians don't follow Christianity; they follow Christ
- Christians don't proclaim themselves; they proclaim Christ
- Christians don't point people to core values; they point people to Christ
- Christians don't preach about Christ; they preach Christ.”

It is so very easy to major on minors, to get sidetracked from the main thing, to focus on the peripheral rather than the central, the optional rather than the essential, to deal with symptoms rather than to go to the heart of the matter. I can concentrate on my needs and seek solutions for my problems, but they may not identify the heart of the matter. I may talk about beliefs, doctrines, world views, ethics, pastoral concerns, stress, sickness, depression, and come up with helpful responses from the Bible, but in the process fail to go to the heart of the matter. What is the heart of the matter? What is the main business of the church and the Christian?

St. Paul, writing from his prison cell to Timothy, chained like a criminal, suffering for his gospel, goes to the heart of the matter. “Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David.” (2 Timothy 2:8) He is in prison because of Jesus Christ. The church he helped to establish would not exist without Jesus Christ. The good news which he preached has to do with Jesus Christ.

But which Jesus Christ? It is very easy to cast Jesus Christ in your own image: as a human teacher, a moral exemplar, a tragic victim, a New Age guru, a Jewish prophet, or some other. Paul identifies him as the one raised from the dead and descended from David. In other words he is the risen and ever-present Lord, who has conquered death, sin and the devil; and also the Messianic, anointed King, promised from of old to establish the kingdom of God on earth for ever and ever. Why is this good news – gospel? And why is this gospel so important? Because it goes to the heart of the matter with all of us. It deals with the human predicament.

Our human predicament is that we are all under the sentence of death. We are all condemned to die – no exceptions. Humanity began when humanoids became aware of death. Death affects all that diminishes life, all that threatens our wellbeing. Spiritual death is our separation from God. The results are anxiety, despair, and hopelessness. How we face the reality of death defines who we are. We search for the meaning of life, the purpose for our existence, eternal significance, and ultimate value. It is Jesus Christ who conquered death on our behalf, and shares his victory with us. It is Jesus Christ who came that we might have life in all its fullness. It is Jesus Christ who, by his resurrection, won for us eternal life. It is Jesus Christ who defeats anxiety, despair and hopelessness with peace, joy and hope as we live with him in his risen life.

The life of man, as Thomas Hobbes wrote in *Leviathan*, is “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.” God said of Adam, that “it is not good for man to be alone.” (Genesis 2:18) Yet loneliness, alienation, difficulty in relationships, selfishness, personal irresponsibility, and cruelty of one to the other is endemic amongst us. The results are hate, jealousy, and conflict. Forty percent of all children in the United States are born out of wedlock. Marriages and families are disintegrating throughout society. Addiction and crime continues to increase. Prisons are overcrowded. Schools are not safe places. We search for security, for acceptance, for support, for love, for a sense of belonging, for community, for friendship and for intimacy in relationships.

It is Jesus Christ who called us into a new covenant community, his chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God. (1 Peter 2:9) It is Jesus Christ who brings into being the kingdom of God in which we are all brothers and sisters, citizens of heaven, and members of the family of God. It is Jesus Christ who enables us to love one another as he has loved us. (John 13:34,35) It is through Jesus Christ that we are accepted, loved, and restored to fellowship with God. It is Jesus Christ who reigns forever and ever over a kingdom of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. (Romans 14:17) It is Jesus Christ whom the Spirit of the Lord anointed to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim freedom for prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, and release for the oppressed.

“This is my gospel for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God’s word is not chained. Therefore I endure everything for the sake of those God calls, so that they will get in on the salvation of Christ in all its glory.” (2 Timothy 2:8-10) You don’t suffer for something that is not worth it. But anything that is worthwhile in this life, and the life to come, involves suffering. There is no gain without pain. There is no crown without a cross. The road to life is through death, and the road to glory is through suffering. Why should we expect things to be easy for us? Yet there is a great reward at the end of the journey.

“Here is a trustworthy saying:

If we die with him, we’ll live with him;

If we stick it out with him, we’ll rule with him;

If we turn our backs on him, he’ll turn his back on us;

If we give up on him, he does not give up –

for there’s no way he can be false to himself.” (2 Timothy 2:11-13)

The church is not primarily about liturgy, or music, or preaching, or fellowship, or good works, or outreach, or meetings, or pastoral care, or classes. Being a Christian is not merely a matter of belief or behavior. It is all about Jesus Christ, who he is and what he has done for us. It is all about our relationship to Jesus Christ. It is only Jesus Christ who can change the human heart. It is only Jesus Christ who can cleanse us and renew us. It is only Jesus Christ who can give us a vision for the restoration of life in a new heavens and a new earth. It is only Jesus Christ who can bring hope to a hurting world.

If this is the heart of the matter, what are we willing to do to reach people for Christ? Paul was willing to suffer, go to prison and die for his gospel. What are we willing to do for the gospel? Have we made it our own? Who do we know who needs this gospel? Who do we know who needs Jesus Christ? How can we communicate to them this good news? How important is it to us to share this gospel with them? “Remember Jesus Christ.”

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