

**Sunday June 29, 2008**

PWF Youth Service

Guest Speaker: Matt Chapman

**All the Way People**

Good morning. I want to begin with an illustration; but I'm going to need some mood lighting from the producers... perfect.

Try to imagine that this table is the "formless and empty" earth... and that "God is hovering over the waters." Now if it helps you with visualization, I will play God... Of course, that may be difficult to imagine... As we all know, if I were God, I would be taller! So it was that God was hanging out in some empty space, and He decided to create some things... Trees, flowers, a couple of dinosaurs, and the sun... And it was good; things were going really well. A little while later (these disappeared; knowbody's sure exactly how that happened) and God was playing with some plasticeen... In a moment of inspiration... He created... a little man! This was a very exciting time – man and his creator hanging out, naming some animals... Gold fish, Springer Spaniel, frog, Silver Trout... Then God said to the little man, 'it is not good for you to be alone,' so He knocked him out, took one of his ribs and created woman... Now this truly was a unique time in history. The Bible says that God *walked* with them in the garden - - the Creator and the created, walking and talking together. And then God said to them, 'I want to give you a very special gift – it's the gift of choice. It means that you are free to choose whatever you want to do; but please know that I desire fellowship with you everyday, I love you, and I have a plan for your life...'

Soon there were a lot more people, (I can't tell you how that happened; this is a Family-rated illustration)... And one day some of those people met with some investors, and they invented a car! Everyone was very excited, and they said 'look God, a car. Now we can really go places!' 'That's great,' said God, 'buckle-up; drive safe.' Not too long after that some other people invented a two-story house with an ensuite... Well, everybody liked that so much that they made another one, and then another... rows and rows of them... Along with these came paved roads and bridges... castles, buildings, sports like basketball and golf... remote controls, ipods, the internet, and processed food. Mmmm, "Beeferoni;" that's a step in the right direction! They created an entire culture; a world unto itself; and everyone got so busy,

and the buildings got so high, that they kind of lost sight of God... They became self-sufficient; at least, that's what they believed... and God was just kind of left out here. And even though the people whom God created were so consumed by the culture they created, God did not leave them. Instead, He continued to whisper to them: 'I'm still here; I still desire fellowship with you, I still love you. And I have a plan for your life... Please don't waste this time that has been given to you...'

We are ALL-THE-WAY people, aren't we...? We want the granite counter-tops, the best schools for our kids, the best education, the best-looking lawns, the prestigious job titles, the most advanced technology, the leather seats that heat-up in the winter (I had those once...) We belong to a culture that says "Go BIG or Go HOME!" And so we do - - we go BIG... We are all-the-way people. But when it comes to our walk with God, we can so easily be half-way people.

Søren Kierkegaard, a brilliant 19<sup>th</sup> century writer and thinker, called Christians "**scheming swindlers.**"

When I read this I wasn't exactly sure what a "swindler" was; so I grabbed a dictionary. It turns out that the definition of 'swindler' is a person who **deceives** or **cheats** in order to obtain something for him self... And it made me wonder: *Is this the reputation of Christians in the world today?* Kierkegaard goes on to say that the Bible is really rather easy to understand; but that we, in our own way, pretend not to understand it... That we make the Bible something we can interpret so that we can apply it to our lifestyle as we each see fit – in the way that's most convenient to us and to the things we want to do with our lives.

Kierkegaard argues that we do this because we know that the minute we **understand** what the Bible says, we become obliged to **act**... or not to. The problem or course is that choosing to act – choosing to **respond** to the call of Jesus, is completely counter-cultural, and it would ruin our lives.

The question we struggled with this year (in *Playing With Fire*) was posed by a man named Shane Claiborne, (author of the *Irresistible Revolution*): **What if Jesus meant the stuff he said?** What if they were not just words to read on the big screen at church, or discuss in our

small groups, but a direct **call to be transformed**, and to live in such a way that our culture and world are changed because of it?

As Paul said, our objective this year was to focus on the truly radical message of Jesus, and to ask ourselves, '**do we, as believers, defend ourselves against this radical message, to ensure that we can continue to be Christians without having to change too much about the way we live?**

Last week, one of the things Ken talked to us about was the early church, as described in the book of Acts. We've learned that this 'Church' was not a building, or a set of doctrines, but a group of people who deeply desired to live-out Christ's call to 'follow Him' and to do as He did... They got together, loved one another, encouraged one another, shared their belongings, and walked hand-in-hand toward the goal of Christ-likeness. Now if we are to consider the kind of discipleship that is lived-out today, we should first look to what discipleship was in the early church...

These first-century Christ-followers **obeyed the commands of Jesus in a radical, life-transforming way**. They demonstrated to the world **a new way of living**. They **lived out** the gospel for the world to see. Of course, in the same way as us today, they made mistakes, they stumbled, they failed and they sinned. BUT one thing was very clear to the watching world: discipleship meant complete reformation. For these Christ-followers, **the whole of life** came under the revolutionizing impact of Jesus Christ and the authority of the Word of God.

What's amazing about Paul (the other/biblical Paul; but I think you're amazing too Paul), as we read about his leadership in Acts, is that he called people to bring the **whole** of their lives – everything they were and everything they had – and give it over to serving God... We are called to devote everything. We are called to be ALL-THE-WAY people for God! The thing is, we tend to be more all-the-way about this stuff (reference the crowded table)...

Teenager-hood is a very unique stage in life. This is the stage that the 'professionals' say is critical to developing a sense of *identity*. Now I'm not convinced that these 'professionals' really know what they're talking about; I still haven't settled on who I am, and I've long past

the teenager stage. (Paul over here has REALLY past that stage, and he's clueless! [Paul, are you crying?]) For those of us who would call ourselves 'Christians,' the question of identity is the most important question we could ask.

**2 Corinthians 5:17 says: *If any person is in Christ, he or she is a new creature; old things have passed away, for new things have come.***

The Bible makes it clear that through Christ, we have been given a new identity and **a new reference point from which to live in our culture...** Everything that we have talked about, or that Ken has talked about over the years, and every discussion to follow, either here or in your small group, is pointless if we don't **know for a fact that God has made us new men and women.**

This year (in PWF) we have carefully considered what Mr. Kierkegaard said, and wondered what it would take to prove him wrong! We've talked about the idea that perhaps we have a tendency to *call* ourselves *Christians*, but when it comes to the question of *how* we actually *live* our lives, perhaps we would rather be comfortable, and do things that are familiar to us, and safe.

**"So what is Christianity, then,"** asks a young man at the back of the room? Is it just a kind of title; something that reminds us that we have been 'saved,' that we automatically have plans every Sunday morning, that we should wave-people-in when driving in traffic, drop the occasional loonie in the empty Tim Horton's cup of a homeless man or woman, and sponsor a child in Africa? Hey, these are good things... but what if these are spiritually cosmetic changes, and we never go deeper...? What if **we have no idea where Jesus wants to take us?**

At one point this year (in PWF) we had a head-on collision with the scripture Matthew 16, verse 15. In this verse Jesus asked His disciples: "Who do you say that I am?" As we sorted through the pieces of this collision someone asked, if we call ourselves *Christians*, and that's who we are, then shouldn't we really understand: **WHO IS CHRIST?**

As Jesus' disciples stood there before Him, they were challenged to give only one of two answers: to either affirm or deny who Jesus was. Whether we realize it or not, we answer

this same question “Who is Christ?” everyday of our lives. In fact, we answer it with every decision we make. The question is so great that it embraces all of life... The things we say, the things we do – **Our daily choices and actions either serve or deny Jesus and His call on our life.**

Last year Paul spoke up here about the scripture Micah 6:8... And that really marked the beginning of our journey at PWF. The verse re-phrases a question that we find ourselves asking all the time: “God, what do you want me to do?... What IS your call on my life?” These are important questions, and we can sometimes we can get caught waiting for an answer – waiting for a sense or a sign – and we can end-up waiting for a long time... But God answers these questions in the scriptures! **Micah 6:8 says: “What does God require of you?”** And then it lists these three things: **act justly, love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.**

I think we often miss the importance of this first one. Surely we value and believe in the importance of love and mercy, and the importance humility... but perhaps we don't have quite as firm a grasp on the importance of justice? We just need to turn on the news or surf the internet and we can be **overwhelmed** by images of genocide in Darfur... the ridiculous and demoralizing poverty in places like Gambia, or Ethiopia... the heart-breaking pictures of abandoned toddlers in Brazil... and something we don't see too much of - - is one of the most profitable underground industries in the world today – child slavery – which is a 32 billion dollar a year industry... And all of this is loaded onto a history of injustice - - the Holocaust, slavery... and the list goes on.

How can we avoid the question “why?” I hear people ask and I've caught myself asking - - ‘God, why do you allow all of this injustice in the world?’ - - After all, are you not the God of love and mercy? Of course, I wasn't really prepared for His answer... “Why do **you** allow all of this injustice in the world, Matt? **You are my body, my hands, and my feet.**” There's an incredible and sobering verse in the Bible, found in **Isaiah 58:6-12**

***I'll tell you what it really means to worship the LORD. Remove the chains of prisoners who are chained unjustly. Free those who are abused! Share your food with everyone who is hungry; share your home with the poor and homeless. Give clothes to those in need; don't turn away your relatives. Then your light will shine like the dawning sun, and you will quickly be healed...***

One of my favorite songs was written by Leonard Cohen. It's called "If it be your will." The idea of God's will addresses the fundamental crux of discipleship today: **God's agenda for our lives vs. our own agenda for our lives...** We discovered this year that we cannot read the scriptures and still deny that that we are called to give-up our will, and our agenda, so that God may order our steps, and do His will through us in this world.

**Matthew 16:24 states: *Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.***

I think it's very much become a part of our modern Christian vocabulary to say we don't feel called to this or that particular area of ministry: I don't feel called to serve the poor, or I don't feel lead to serve in the Church... But this approach to discipleship is a perfect example of how we can interpret the Bible according to what we prefer... Scripture makes it clear that we are ALREADY CALLED to be like Christ – and to be like Christ *is to serve the poor.*

**Matthew 25: 34- 40, *"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'"***

To be like Christ *is to serve other people with generosity and love.*

**Romans 12: 13, *Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.***

**1 John 3: 17, *If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?***

To be like Christ *is to confront the injustices in this world.*

**Proverbs 31:9, "Speak up for the people who have no voice, for the rights of all the down-and-outers."Speak out for justice! Stand up for the poor and destitute!"**

And to be like Christ *is to die to our agendas so that He may work through us according to HIS WILL!*

As for serving in the church... the book of ACTS teaches us that people are the Church. We are to serve others, and to serve each other.

What we need to recognize is that a little interpretation can take us way off... And we end-up over here somewhere, content... and missing it!

About a year ago, Blaise and I were driving downtown to have dinner. We were excited about this for two reasons: first, because the kids were at Papa's house, and we had not had dinner, just the two of us, in a long time. Second, because we had been reading some very inspiring books over several months, and we wanted to talk seriously about how we could better serve God with the way we lived. As we pulled off the highway and stopped at a streetlight, a homeless man approached our car. Blaise immediately recognized him from another time they had met and she had given him some money. We foraged through the car, but could only find \$5. Now this particular stoplight was famously delayed, and we struck-up a conversation with the man. He told us that he has cancer and that his two kids, a son and a daughter, both in their 20's, don't see him any more. I asked him what his kids do. He said that his son works in a bank, and then he began to well-up, as if he were about to cry... He told us that his daughter is now on the streets, and his heart was broken because of it. The light switched green and the tradition of forward momentum prompted us to say goodbye and drive ahead. We went on with our night; enjoyed our dinner and discussing what God might want for the Church and for us...

It wasn't until we were on our way home that the sobering revelation kicked-in... It felt like The Holy Spirit had punched us in the stomach (in a good way). We had spent the whole night talking about how God is calling us to ACTION, and DOING what we talk about, and yet even with the best of opportunities to respond to that call, we did nothing but eat expensive

pasta. We asked ourselves, what more could we have done for that man? What if we had said to him: “We’re just heading down the road to get something to eat. We would love it if you would join us. I’m interested in hearing more about your life and your kids.” How he might have responded isn’t really the point... the point is we are called to be followers of Jesus... and **what would Jesus have done for this man if He had been driving by? How would His agenda have changed?**

When we look to the parable of the Good Samaritan, we should rightly assume that the Good Samaritan was on his way to somewhere; that he wasn’t just hanging out on the streets looking for an opportunity to do a good deed. But he stopped, he put his agenda aside to help and love another. This story illustrates what Jesus meant when He called us to serve others, when He called us to love others, and when He called us to treat others in the same way we would like to be treated. What hit Blaise & I while we were driving home were Jesus’ words: **whatever you do for the least of these you do for me...** We gave **Jesus** five bucks and drove on by... so that we could spend an evening talking about **Jesus**... Do you see the absurdity of it?

The truth is, we can easily get caught leading absurd lives (refer back to the table).

John Piper writes a profoundly true idea:

***“It’s not the banquet of the wicked that dulls our appetite for heaven, but the endless nibbling at the table of the world. It is not the X-rated video, but the prime-time dribble of triviality we drink from every night... The most deadly appetites are not for the poison of evil, but for the simple pleasures of earth... for when these replace an appetite for God himself, (we lose our way).”***

Some of us have been nibbling at the table of our culture for so long, that we have forgotten that we have been created not for this (table), but for fellowship with God, and community with others. We are called to demonstrate to this culture and the world another way of living...

In CLOSING...

We need to be reminded about something Ken spoke about last week... Ken talked about how hard this kind of counter-cultural living can be... How hard it can be to live-out this radical call of Jesus... After all, Jesus was a servant. He gave everything; not 10%, not 15% - - but a 100%! And He whispers to each of us: Follow me, do as I do, I will give you the strength to do it... Yes, it can be hard; but the truth is, ***if human spiritual transformation was easy, it would not have required the cross...***

I believe we are upon the threshold of a rush of God's Spirit... that we are upon the threshold of a revolution. I believe that because history has taught that when a few hundred people (like us), unite with a common goal – to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ, throughout our communities, our culture, and the world, by the way we live our lives... that's how fires begin! And that's how they spread...

I would like to close in prayer...

BAND COMES UP.

Song: Lead Me to the Cross

*Closing thought:*

*Take a look at your hands. These have been given to us to DO the work of our Lord - - the One who gave us life. Take a look at your feet. These have been given to us to walk in the way of our Lord – to follow Him. Take a look at your possessions. They're not yours. They're not mine. They belong to God, and He calls us to use our stuff, and our time, and our money for His glory, and His work on this planet. ...When you came in this morning you were given a little golf pencil, or if you have a pen, and the back of your book-list or bulletin is blank... As Blaise sings this next song, I hope that we can use this time to reflect... Maybe some of us need to ask God to shine His highbeams into our life, and to expose the areas where we have been half-way; and where we have been nibbling at the table of this culture... We wonder so easily into consumerism, and our stuff, and our agendas... We need Jesus to lead us to the Cross... and to lead us to our knees before the one who created us...*

*This is an opportunity for you to make a **declaration** - - to write it down - - to write down how you want to choose to live... and whom you want to live for.*