

It's About Time...

You Kept Important Promises

Matthew 5:33-37

With 2008 finally here, this morning I want to begin a series entitled "It's About Time". With the coming of the new year, resolutions, adjustments, decisions are made in order that the coming year may be more productive, more enjoyable, or even more controllable. We make resolutions in hopes that some form of action will take place and yet at times only our best intentions are left blaring us in the face till the next year, or the year after that. You can only make the same resolutions so many times before you have to do something about them.

There is an Indian tribe in South America whose concept of the past and the future seems to be the exact opposite of our point of view. We would refer to the past as being behind us, and the future ahead of us. However, to this particular tribe, the past is thought of as being ahead of them, and the future as being behind them.

At first this may seem a little strange to us, and many will undoubtedly wonder how anyone could possibly be foolish to think in this manner. The reasoning of these Indians however is really quite logical. All that they have experienced – their mistakes, their failures, their lessons learned – when considered in front of them, it is there for their thinking, reasoning, processing in order that they may better their life. The future on the other hand is behind them because it has not yet been experienced.

We, in our western mindset, tend to leave the past in the past without learning from anything we have experienced there. The reality is that we will never be able to escape the past until we deal with it. It is about time that we step up and live out our freedom in Christ, leaving behind clutter, wounds, emptiness. It is about time that we stop talking about our best intentions and start living them out, especially in our spiritual walk with God.

Over the next number of weeks I want to look at six areas where it is about time we stop talking about them and start living them. **Living a life of faith requires trust and obedience, steps of surrender and purpose.** God wants to take our lives from where it has been to a place beyond our mere existence to a full life. **Ephesians 3:19** tells us:

19 May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.

How many of us can agree this morning that we are not full? Like all of those Taco Bell commercials where the people cry out "I'm Full", I believe that we will never be able to

say those words until we live with our father in heaven. And even then I don't know if we could say it. **Part of God's fullness for our lives is for us to take action.**

It is time you kept an important promise. In **Matthew 5:33-37** we read of how Jesus confronts the religious people of his day. There were definite things he didn't like about them and what they did. Let's read it this morning in our text:

33 "You have also heard that our ancestors were told, 'You must not break your vows; you must carry out the vows you make to the Lord.' 34 But I say, do not make any vows! Do not say, 'By heaven!' because heaven is God's throne. 35 And do not say, 'By the earth!' because the earth is his footstool. And do not say, 'By Jerusalem!' for Jerusalem is the city of the great King. 36 Do not even say, 'By my head!' for you can't turn one hair white or black. 37 Just say a simple, 'Yes, I will,' or 'No, I won't.' Anything beyond this is from the evil one.*

Talk is cheap. Actions speak louder than words. There are all kinds of clichés we could use to point out that words are meaningless with out some form of action. But is that all that Jesus trying to point out here? I believe it is only part of what he is trying to get at. When you study why Jesus had to make this statement you catch a great understanding of what Jesus was trying to say.

The Rabbi's of the time taught that oaths that omitted God's name could be broken and were not binding. In fact, they made up elaborate rules based on the third commandment of the Old Testament found in **Exodus 20:7**:

7 "You must not misuse the name of the Lord your God. The Lord will not let you go unpunished if you misuse his name."

The law isn't just talking about using the name "Jesus Christ" every time something we disagree with happens, or crying out that "God damn" whatever it may be. It is about something greater than that.

Important Promise #1: Honoring My Commitment to Live for Him.

David wrote in **Psalms 50:14**:

14 Make thankfulness your sacrifice to God, and keep the vows you made to the Most High.

*4 When you make a promise to God, don't delay in following through, for God takes no pleasure in fools. Keep all the promises you make to him. **Ecclesiastes 5:4***

In some translations of the Bible it tells us to "Pay our vows". Making a vow to God and then trying to increase or validate it with a public proclamation, and then not

following through, damages our relationship with God. God wants us to keep our promises that we have made to him, without any excuses or clarifications.

When you asked for Jesus to come and live in your life, when you asked for him to be your Lord, your King, your God, with it you made a promise to let him be those things in your life. When you heard God speak to you and ask you to surrender your life to him and you agreed, you made a promise to trust him and let him have every area of your life. When you promised to turn away from your past sin and try to live a new life, living the way he wants you to, God wants your life to change.

It is about time you kept an important promise. We can make all of the excuses we can – it's too hard, I can't give that up, what about me, I've already given the parts of my life I want to give. What promise have you made God and what steps are you taking right now to fulfill it, or pay your vow?

God came to change you, to grow you up, to bring hope and love to people who are surrounded by emptiness and condition. His process and asking of our faith and trust is the result of us asking him for his love and forgiveness.

It pains the heart of God when we merely become Christians of empty profession, instead of Christians of living vibrant faith. God doesn't want talking Christians (like talking dolls with a pull string), but living believers and followers of him.

Again, let me reiterate, God doesn't want us to motivated by rules, but by love. You and I are in a covenant with him, an agreement that is to be motivated out of love. If you want to see God change your life and do things in you like you have never experienced before, if you want to see his will and plan played out in your life, if you want purpose to motivate you each and everyday, remember your agreement, your vow to him, and live it out loud.

Promise #2: To Represent Him Well.

I believe that one of the reasons why Christianity seems to be failing in this country is because people's ideas of Christianity have been skewed by misrepresentation. Let's face it, we all have known people who could have stopped us from coming to church. **And one of the greatest complaints about the church has been hypocrisy** – saying one things with our mouths and living the opposite. Are Christians more truthful, are they keeping promises more so than the rest of the world?

According to studies done by the George Barna Research, when studies were done on young adults 14-31, they found that while outside of the church 63% of non-believers believed that lying was sometimes necessary, 45% of Christians believed the same.

People are no longer turning to the church because it is no different from the rest of the world. So, where is the power of God to change people? And if we are representatives, light in the darkness to this world, what kind of image of Jesus are we showing?

When it comes to believers in Christ, people should be able to know what to expect from us by simply taking us at our word. What we say, we do! Because that is what God would do isn't it? **Colossians 3:17** tells us:

17 And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father.

If you have to use words like "I promise" or "I swear" it says in the Matthew Henry's commentary that "oath taking is an implicit confession that we do not always tell the truth".

It's about time you kept an important promise to honor your commitment to live for God, and represent him well. Make decisions in your life that line up with your commitment to him, and live them out. There may even be some here, whom God has already spoken to about something specific in your life, but you have neglected to fulfill your part of your commitment to him. Don't just talk about your relationship with God, live it out loud. Stop trying to live a secret agent Christianity where sometimes you can't tell you are one.

Let your commitment to God be your first commitment fulfilled in 2008 and live your faith to the fullest. Amen!