

January 13, 2008

Text: Acts 10:34—43

Title: "It's Time to Get Going"

It's time to get going

Recently I went to the doctor for a physical. One of the main reasons for going was to get my cholesterol checked. I was worried it might be too high. And sure enough it was, not stratospherically too high, but still higher than it should be. That confirmation, of what I already suspected was enough for me to say to myself, "It's time to get going."

I had known I was being lazy and not getting enough exercise. I had also known I probably should lose a little weight, and that my eating habits weren't helping that situation any. So, finding out my cholesterol was too high, was enough to get me exercising again, on a daily basis. I resumed walking down along the river. And I got back to running, although I'm still trying to be more consistent with that.

Losing weight has not come so easy. It's been hard, so far, for me to change eating habits built up over my whole life. But, I'm still intent on changing those habits. I am convinced by the medical tests, it's time to get going.

This realization leads to another one. It might also be helpful for us to have a "physical", so to speak in other areas of our life. We might benefit from a "spiritual physical", checking the old "spiritual cholesterol".

As ones who claim discipleship to Jesus Christ, who call this Jesus, "Lord" over our life, what do you suspect you would find, if you reflected on your life as a disciple of Jesus? Would you find that you are being lazy? Would you find, spiritually, you don't have the best habits? There is a sense of urgency behind these questions. You might discover, it's time to get going here too.

There is also a sense of urgency in Peter's words, from the reading in Acts. As he explains the good news about Jesus Christ to Cornelius, and all those present in his house; he begins by saying, "anyone who fears [God] and does what is right is acceptable to him."

If you are like me, you immediately apply these words to yourself, to your life, and probably with a little fear and sense of foreboding, wonder, "Am I doing what is right? Am I acceptable to God?" There is urgency in these questions. There is a lot at stake.

If we are serious about being a disciple these questions can be scary. And maybe that's the key point, are we serious about discipleship, serious enough to do what is right, to change our lives so that we can be said to be a follower, a disciple of Jesus.

There is urgency in longing to hear from the one you call Lord of your life, "Well done, good and faithful servant! ... Come and share your master's happiness!" If you are serious about your discipleship, there is no happiness, no joy, unless you can hear those words from the one you call Lord.

To help you take a look at yourself and your discipleship, I would like to share with you some practical points to help you along the way.

practical point #1: stop!

Practical point #1 is to stop. Many of us are so busy, running so fast, have so many commitments, we may have no idea what we're doing, or why. We may have no idea if we are being a good disciple or not. We don't have time to stop and think about it. Like me, with my cholesterol, though, I think we do have a pretty good idea. We are just choosing not to think about it; and choosing not to do anything about it.

So, the first point is just to stop. Make sure you have time, frequently, and on a regular basis, to reflect and dwell on your life and your relationships. Stop everything else you are doing and just spend time in prayer and reflection. Ask God to reveal to you how your relationship is going with him, first of all. Then ask how your relationships are with your family and friends, people you meet throughout the day. Ask if you are being a follower of Jesus – by your actions and deeds, by your words and thoughts.

Oswald Chambers talks about this time of “solitude” spent with Jesus. He says God is “making us spell out our own souls.” And this takes time. He says, “It is slow work.” What God is up to is making us men and women, disciples “after His own purpose.” He says, “The only way we can be of use to God is to let Him take us through the crooks and crannies of our own characters.”

This does take time. To be able to pray and reflect, to be in a relationship with God, and anyone else for that matter, takes time. Relationships are not something to be done in a hurry, to be fit in between other commitments. Can you see the negative effect if we don't give God the time to mold us, and make us His disciple. We need to give God the time to work in us a new creation.

practical point #2: start seeing

This leads to practical point #2, start seeing. More specifically start seeing rightly.

I said earlier I had started walking again by the river. I went earlier this week, but didn't really have enough time, because I had to get to work and I hadn't given myself enough time. As a result I had to cut my walk short. Not only that, but I was not able to enjoy my walk. Because of my time restrictions it was just a matter of getting this chore out of the way, and so I was merely putting one foot in front of the other in order to get back and get on to the next thing.

I really felt something was missing in my walk, because I couldn't relax and enjoy it, couldn't see and enjoy anything around me. It is the same with spiritual seeing. It takes time to see in this way too. You have to be able to look around you and take in what you see.

If you are in a hurry and pre-occupied you will not see. It takes time to see where you are going, where you are trying to get to; and it takes time to see why.

There are two aspects to seeing rightly, and they are both found in Peter's sermon to Cornelius. First Peter says you need to do right to be acceptable to God. As I said, knowing myself, this only produces fear and anxiety for me.

But then Peter says, God sent the message of peace by Jesus Christ. At first glance these seem to contradict one another. How do fear and anxiety fit with knowing peace? If we are concerned that we do what is right in the sight of God, what is produced in us is fear of God; fear of not being acceptable. What we have is fear, and anything but peace. But Peter says in Jesus we are able to find peace.

Seeing rightly realizes the peace that comes from being acceptable does not come from what we do, but it comes to us through Jesus Christ, and through him alone.

When Jesus was asked, “What must we do to perform the works of God?” He answered, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” That is believe in Jesus Christ and his coming to bring forgiveness of all you have done wrong in your life, and all you will do wrong. Believing in Jesus Christ is to know peace.

You have forgiveness through his name. And in his name you do have peace because of the forgiveness of your sins he has given you.

Since today we are remembering the Baptism of Our Lord, it is fitting to bring baptism into the equation. In one of my devotional books, for this day, they have an excerpt from Luther’s writings actually talking about our baptism.

Instead of your baptism being a one time event, in the past, that has no bearing on your life today, Luther emphasizes the continuing benefit of your baptism. He talks about your baptism as a ship on which you are sailing along. This ship, baptism, cannot be shipwrecked. However, there are times we may slip and fall out of the ship. But when this happens, you must swim back to the ship again and cling to it until you can climb back on deck and sail forward again.

What Luther is talking about is the peace you have through Jesus Christ and knowing this peace because of your baptism. You hold tight to your baptism as confirmation of the peace Jesus has given you.

Luther says that your baptism is a “splendid” thing. It “defeats and puts away sins, daily strengthens the new [person] in us ... and remains with us until we leave our present troubles to enter glory everlasting.” In other words, your baptism is your assurance of peace before God, through the name by which your sins are washed away.

Luther says to think of your baptism as your “everyday wear, to be worn constantly.”

Can you see how keeping your baptism in your heart and mind, and constantly wearing it as though you were clothed in it changes the way you see? It changes the way you see God, the way you see fear of God, and what you need to do to be acceptable to him. It changes the relationship you have with God. It changes the relationships you have with others in the world – family, friends, complete strangers. It is a way of seeing that allows you to start living the way you are meant to live.

practical point #3: start living

Knowing the peace of Jesus allows you to live in that peace, and to live out of that peace. And this is practical point #3, start living, really living.

In order to live, and to know peace, in order to be a disciple, you need to know what Jesus means for you, why He is so important.

To illustrate this I would like to paraphrase the description of a brief scene I ran across. It is a scene that shows people looking for a way to be rescued from a predicament they are in, but without much hope.

Picture a sea of faces, all looking. “All [you] see are wide eyes and hopeless faces, pale faces, dark faces, young faces, old faces, [everyone] cramming and crowding, close and silent and sorrowful.”

But there is one face that is different. “[It’s] expression was the one that contained hope.” And so you ask that one, “Why do you look like that? Why [aren’t] you at the end of your hope?”

The reply, “Because of Jesus.” Then you realize what that means. It is because of hope that does not end. The hope you have in Jesus. Now the burden is lifted from your shoulders. This is what it means to know peace. You are free to live.

We all want to be like that one face, to be filled with hope. Jesus promises you this hope, and you find it in him. That is what Jesus means for you.

It’s time to get going. There is a sense of urgency. Either we believe that Jesus is our source of peace or we don’t. Either we believe Jesus is Lord of all or we don’t. If you are serious about being a disciple of Jesus; if you really want to call Jesus, “Lord”, and have it reflected in your life:

First, stop, give your relationship with God time to grow. Allow him to mold you for His purpose, that is what it means to be His disciple.

Then see that your life and your hope are only in Jesus Christ. If you are worried about being acceptable, look to your baptism. Remember the promise in your baptism. God says you are already accepted. Hold tight to that promise. Your baptism is your guarantee, and your hope.

Finally, go out and live the way God meant for you to live. May the Lord bless you and keep you, and may the Lord give you His peace. Amen.