

# "Legacy: Mission Accomplished"

Revelation 20:11-21:5 and Matthew 21:28-32

A Sermon by Dr. Jim Davis

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I've been thinking all week about what I wanted to say to you this morning. Because, for the last three weeks, we've been thinking together about a big topic, the *Missio Dei*, the mission of God. We've been thinking about it for several reasons.

First because it's what God created us for. We were created, Genesis says, for a relationship and a role; a relationship with God and a role working beside Him, helping fulfill His mission in the world.

But we failed to be the partners God planned for us to be. And from the moment of our failure a new mission began. It continued through the Old Testament. That's the past of the *Missio Dei*.

Then, at the right time, God sent His Son; to redeem us, to pay for our sins and give us the possibility of once again having a relationship with God. "God so loved the world ..." That's the way John says it. And the world, we learned, means each of us individually, each of us personally. That's the personal present of the *Missio Dei*.

Then, last week, there was more. We read Romans and 2 Corinthians. We learned God redeemed us not only to bring us not only to bring us back into relationship with Him. He redeemed us to give us back our role working beside Him. We learned we are meant to be "God's co-workers," helping to reconcile the world to God through Christ. And we have the ability to do that through everything we say and everything we do. That's the universal present of the *Missio Dei*.

Genesis, John, Romans, 2 Corinthians ... and now, this morning, we've just read two more two more texts. They talk about the *Missio Dei* in the present and the future, and I've been thinking all week about what I wanted to say to you about them. For trying to talk about both these Scriptures in the same sermon is a little bit like trying to ride two horses at the same time!

I think it was Mark Twain who first said it. "I don't mind trying to ride two horses at the same time," he said; "as long as they're going in the same direction!" And

I hope to show you this morning that Matthew the Book of Revelation are going in the same direction.

So let me start with Matthew. "There was a man," Jesus says, "who had two sons." Now if I had read to you only those words just a minute ago, I'll bet you would have thought I was reading you another parable, the parable of the prodigal son.

But the truth is, there are two parables in the Bible that begin with exactly the same words.

One is a parable in Luke 15 that talks about the way a Father waits to restore a relationship with a prodigal son. The other is this parable in Matthew 21 that talks about the way a Father wants his sons to take up their role and go to work in His vineyard. Two parables, two sons, and two themes: our relationship with God and the role He wants us to play working in His vineyard.

Together these two parables describe the *Missio Dei*. But this morning our focus isn't on the first. It's on the second, so as we start to look at the parable of the two sons in Matthew, I want to draw your attention to the second part of the parable, to the son who says to his Father, "I'll go," but doesn't.

Because the truth is that's the place I think many of us are stuck this morning. We're stuck in the same place as that second son. Like him we're sons and daughters of a Father, a heavenly Father. We're been adopted into His family, and we belong to Him. But for many of us, it's difficult for us to actually think about going to work for God in our lives. And the reason it's difficult is because we're too busy doing something else.

A book came out a few years ago and became an immediate best-seller. It sold over a million copies and made the men who wrote it pretty rich. The authors of the book were a couple of guys named David Freeman and Neil Teplica. It was their story. And it went something like this.

As young men, they went into advertising. They did well, made some money and took a few trips together. They like to travel. So they kept a diary of places they'd been, they really liked, and places they still wanted to go. Then they wrote their book.

"Life's a short journey," they said in the introduction. "How can you make sure you fill it with the most fun and all the coolest places on earth before you pack your bags for the very last time? That's why we wrote this book."

Unfortunately the bags got packed for the very last time for David Freeman sooner than anyone would have imagined. On August 26, 2008, David died after falling off a balcony and hitting his head at his home in Venice, California. He was 47.

The *Los Angeles Times* ran an obituary for him. And it said, that Freeman's parents thought he'd only been able to accomplish about half of his list before his accident. The obituary went on to list some of the things he'd done there. He'd attended the Academy Awards. He'd run with the bulls in Pamplona. He'd gone "land diving" in Vanuatu. He said it was "the best bungee jump in the world."

But among the 100 things David Freeman wanted to do with his life, one thing was missing from the list; going to work in God's vineyard. As far as I can tell from the obituary, David never began a relationship with God. He never attended a church. There's no mention of either one of those things in the obituary. There's no mention of a memorial service either. So I've got to think that for David Freeman, going to work in God's vineyard got crowded out of his life by the things he wanted to do for himself.

And while you and I may be in a different position with God, in a different relationship with Him than David was, the same danger exists for us, doesn't it? Just as Jesus warned us, "the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desire for other things" often enter our lives and take them over. They choke out what the Father says to us.

And instead of working in the vineyard we find ourselves spending our lives working for causes we care about, or trying to earn more money, or taking time to enjoy the good things in life. We find ourselves saying to God on Sunday mornings, "I hear you Father. I really do. And this week, this month, this year, I promise. I'll go to work in the vineyard."

But then, we get to the end of the week or the month or the year. And we look back at our lives and have to say, "You know. I didn't do it. I said would. And I really wanted to. But I didn't do it. I didn't go to work in the vineyard." And I love the fact that Jesus doesn't string out the story. He doesn't really talk about the consequences of either son's decision. He simply asks which one did what his father wanted.

Then he talks about tax collectors and prostitutes what the Father wants. Their turning over their lives to Him. He tells the chief priests and elders that people like that are getting into God's kingdom ahead of them.

But that's where the story ends, with a challenge. It doesn't go farther, because it's not time yet. It's not time yet for Jesus to talk about what happens in the end if you're a son or a daughter of God who says to your Father, "I'll go to work in the vineyard" then don't.

But by the time you get to the Book of Revelation, it's time, time to tell the rest of the story. And in Revelation 20, the story starts back up. There's a throne. Someone's seated on it. People, "great and small," are standing in front of it. And books are being opened. A judgment is being rendered. It's being rendered on the basis of what's written in one of the books, the book of life.

And for "all those whose names are not found written in the book of life" life ends. And we shudder when we read that part of Revelation, don't we? And to those left in front of the throne a loud voice says, "There will be no more death," for you. And we heave a sigh of relief when we read that part of Revelation, don't we? For if we've put our faith in Christ our names are written in the book of life. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in him shouldn't perish but have everlasting life."

But the part of Revelation we usually forget while we focus our attention on the book of life is the part that tells us not once, but twice that everyone's life, everyone's will be judged, everyone's including those who believe, everyone's life will be judged Revelation says, according to what's written in the books, according to what they have done.

And that part of Book of Revelation is trying to tell us something my friends, something important. It's this. Even if our names are written in the book of life, what we do with our lives still matters. It still matters to God. And part of God's judgment of our lives will not be based on the book of life. It will be based on the record, what's written about our lives in the rest of the books.

We'll be judged not only on the basis of our relationship with God. We'll be judged on the basis of our role too. Did we take up our role? Did we do what the Father asked us to do? Did we go to work in the vineyard? That's why Revelation says it twice. Everyone, everyone it says will be judged according to what they've done.

You see the truth is God's call to go and work in the vineyard comes to every Christian, my friends, not just to some. Because the vineyard's a big place. It's the world. And the Father's telling you. My son, my daughter, I want you to go to work in the vineyard. I want you to take us your role. I want you to play your part. I want you to get involved in work I'm doing in your part of the world?

So will you go? Will you go to work in the world where you live tomorrow morning? Will you go to work in the world where you work? Will you go to work in your school, among your friends? Because that's your part of the vineyard. And that's where God's asking you to go to work.

That's what it means to be a missional Christian. That's what it means to lead a missional life. That's what it means to be part of the *Missio Dei*, the mission of God to redeem the whole world.

It begins in the book of Genesis and continues as God partners with people throughout the Old Testament. And we're going to look at one of some of those people starting next week. We're going to look at the life of Abraham and try to learn lessons from his life and the way he partnered with God in the *Missio Dei* that can apply to our lives and show us how we can partner more fully with God.

Then we're going to move to the New Testament. Because the *Missio Dei* reaches a tipping point there. All through Lent we're going to look at the way that a life can perfectly partner with God as we look at the life of Christ.

And we're going to keep going in the months after Easter too. In fact as we move through the rest of this year, we're going to look at ten lives; five from the Old Testament and five from the New that show us how to be co-workers of God, how to be part of the *Missio Dei*. Because the truth is, we need to know. The *Missio Dei* is going on around us right now. And we need to learn how to join it, how to be involved in it. We need to learn how to work in the vineyard.

For someday, someday, the Book of Revelation promises, God will say, "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end." And the mission will be accomplished. And on that day I hope, God will be able to say to you and me, "Well done good and faithful servants." You took time to learn how to go to work in my vineyard. Then you went to work.

Let's pray ...