

# Taking Jesus Seriously

Psalm 8:3-5 & John 14:12-14

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The University of Texas Longhorns football team may have lost to Alabama in the National Championship game, but there is a very winning aspect to their team. As receiver Jordan Shipley stated, "It's not something that gets talked about a lot, but there are a lot of believers on this team. It is awesome to be a part of." The amount of players that attend the Wednesday night Fellowship of Christian Athletes meeting is staggering. On Friday nights before a home game many of the Longhorns visit children at the local hospital. The quarterback of the team, Colt McCoy, had this said of his witness for Christ in a phone call to his dad. Colt and his fellow Longhorns lost to Kansas State in a game where he suffered a pinched nerve in his neck. The call went this way, "I've never seen anything like your son. I was sitting in church this morning when Colt walked in. He was a little late, but he was there, all beat up. I know he couldn't have gotten home from Kansas before 3 or 4 a.m. but he was there for that 9 a.m. service. My little boy saw that. I just want you to know that that was the biggest impression anyone will ever make on my 10 year old son." Resiliency and consistency, the ability to bounce back or move forward in spite of adversity, is not only an important quality to possess. It is a trademark of productive Christian living.

So that our Lord in speaking with his disciples says, "Truly, truly I say to you, he who believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I go to the Father." Wow! What a startling promise! On the surface of it, it seems hard to believe. If this is even remotely possible, then shouldn't we admit that we have never taken Jesus seriously? The least we have to confess is that we have surely been satisfied with far less than He has in mind for us as His followers.

I am reminded of one of Charles Schultz' *Peanuts* cartoons. Snoopy, the hound of heaven, says of Woodstock, that would-be bird of paradise, "Someday, Woodstock is going to be a great eagle." Then in the next frame he says, "He's going to soar thousands of feet above the ground." Woodstock takes off into the air and as Snoopy looks on, he sees Woodstock upside-down and whirling around crazily. So he has second thoughts and in the next frame Snoopy says, "Well, maybe hundreds of feet above the ground . . ." Just then, Woodstock falls to the ground, looking dazed, and Snoopy has to conclude, "Maybe he'll be one of those eagles who just walks around." Isn't it amazing how from a spiritual perspective we settle for less than is promised and is possible? So what do we have here in this admonition of Jesus? "Greater works than these will you do, because I go to the Father?"

Considering all that Jesus did, our quick, off-the-cuff response is, "Yes, but that's Jesus. I'm only human." True, and I suspect his disciples responded that way, too. Yet look at what they accomplished post-resurrection, unbelievable, the church spread like wildfire. And don't forget that you and I are post-resurrection people too. You are more than you give yourself credit for. I think that is in part what Jesus is saying to us in this passage. I recently read of an elderly bachelor and an old maid who started going together. Each had lived alone for many years. Gradually the old gentleman recognized a real attachment to her, but was shy and afraid to tell her his feelings. Finally he mustered up the courage to say, "Let's get married!" Surprised, she threw up her hands and shouted, "It's wonderful to think about, but who in the world would have us?"

It doesn't take much for any of us to sink into that kind of self-understanding. We become self-absorbed. All of our days are gray even when the sun is out and we become riveted on failure. When that happens to me I like to recall the words of the eighth Psalm, verses 3-5, "When I look at the heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor." So when we put the words of the Psalmist and Jesus' words together we ought to get a clear impression that we are more than we give ourselves credit for being.

The second truth is that there is something you can be, but will never be apart from Jesus Christ. Listen to what Jesus said, "Greater works than these will you do, because I go to the Father."

What does that signify? Jesus' point, I believe, is captured in the phrase "because I go to the Father." Because Jesus was willing to go to the cross, because of Jesus' obedient relationship with his father, you and I are on a much different footing with the Almighty than we otherwise would be. We are, as the phrase goes, deeply indebted to Jesus. We are capable of doing great things for God because of Christ.

Think about this. In Jesus' own day he made an impression on a small area of land, the area of the Middle East in which he ministered, and almost none of the great world beyond. Yet his followers have swept across the globe, winning masses for Christ, far more than he ever gained himself. People by the millions have been healed in His name, in lands that would never have heard His name much less been healed, had not medical professionals and missionaries gone to those far-flung corners of the earth with the healing love of Jesus Christ. Right now in the torn country of Haiti, thousands are being rescued and restored by people who are Jesus' disciples of today.

It is not important to list the mighty works or name the names of people who have done those works, because that list would almost be without end. What is important is that those who have done those works all say it was not they who did it, that the inspiration, the power, the endurance that made it possible, all came from Jesus Christ. And that if He had passed out of being on Calvary's cross, if He had not gone to the Father, had not continued to exercise his presence in the power of the Holy Spirit, all of this would be impossible.

There is something you can be, but will never be apart from Jesus Christ. Think of your daily existence. Jesus can make you a loving person; you will never be without Him. Jesus can make you a forgiving person; you can never be apart from Him. Jesus can make you a serving person; you can never be apart from Him. Jesus can make you a witnessing person; you can never be apart from Him. For in those moments in life when we ask ourselves the question, "What would Jesus have me do in this situation? or circumstance?" It is when we submit to the power of Christ through the Holy Spirit that causes us to do the edifying thing.

Out of tragic South Africa comes a poignant reminder of what I am saying. Alan Paton tells the story in his novel, *But Your Land Is Beautiful*. The story takes place in the Holy Church of Zion on Maundy Thursday where the ritual of foot washing precedes Holy Communion. The black pastor has invited Judge Oliver to come to the church to wash the feet of Martha Fortuin, a black woman who has raised and cared for the judge's children. Judge Oliver is known as a white man of character, willing to stand against his fellow jurists on issues where principle is involved. The judge accepts the invitation, but no one could have expected what takes place. The judge, remembering how Martha Fortuin has often kissed the feet of his children, bends over to kiss her feet after he has washed them in ritual. Tears fill the eyes of other worshippers in the tiny church. Somehow the press learns of the event, gives it wide publicity, and it costs Judge Oliver the chief judgeship which was to have been his.

A few days later the black pastor calls on Judge Oliver to ask his forgiveness for involving him in an act that destroyed his professional future. The judge replies, "Taking part in your service on Maundy Thursday is to me more important than any chief judgeship. Think no more about it." And that is why the people of the Holy Church of Zion renamed their church in South Africa, "The Church of Washing Feet." There is something you can be, but will never be apart from Jesus Christ.

My point this morning is this. Since Christ is with us, and we just read in His word that He is, then we can be people of confidence. We don't have to make excuses for being human, and we can believe that greater works than Jesus did in the flesh can be done now because He has been released from the flesh and dwells in all of us who receive Him by faith. So let me ask you, "Who puts the limits on your spiritual contributions to the Kingdom of God? Is it God? Hardly. Is it you?"

Is there a greater tragedy than to die without knowing who and whose you are? Or to live denying who you are? Don't apologize for your humanity, rather plug into the power that is given to you as Christ dwells in you. God doesn't call on us to be superhuman, just superbly human, and that happens when we live for Christ.