

**THE
BON AIR
PULPIT**

June 11, 2000

Scripture: Matthew 28:19-20
Sermon: Beyond the Horizon

If you have read the last books that tell us about Jesus, all of them end the same way. Jesus is resurrected from the dead, He is getting ready to be ascended back to His Father and He has gathered His faithful disciples together to give them their last instructions. The last instructions are what we call the great commission, the great challenge God gives us as His followers. I wanted to read one of those recordings which is in the book of Matthew 28:16. *Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee to the mountain where Jesus told them to go. When they saw Him they worshipped though they still had doubts in their minds. Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and earth hath been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. Surely I am with you always to the very end of the age."*

There is an old story out of colonial America. A group of pilgrims took the long and treacherous journey in wooden boats to come to the new world. For several years their little settlement began to grow, people began to come to the community and finally some of them began to move further out into the wilderness. So great was the growth of the little community that one day the city council made the suggestion that they build a road that would go out from the town and go five miles out into the wilderness. The suggestion caused an absolute uproar. The night it was to be discussed at the city council the place was packed and the mood was very belligerent. Some of the statements made were these. "This is the worse use of our taxpayers money I have ever heard of in my life. Who in the world would have ever thought to build a road five miles out into the woods; who would ever use it"? I wanted to remind you that these were exactly the same people who had gotten on a boat and taken the treacherous journey all the way to the new world. They were the people who had cut down trees and built a permanent house. They were the ones who for the first time took a plough into virgin soil. They were the first ones to determine to build a structure in which to live but the difficulty was that they became settled and they became comfortable and they felt a road five miles further than where they lived was a waste of money.

That old story reminds us that you and I have a common, human, fallacy. It is that sometimes we become very adventuresome but most of the time, we really don't want to change. We really do not want to accept any new challenge to our life. I remind you that Jesus Christ was crucified because they said He wants to change the way in

which we worship. All of us are reminded that people who brought to us some of the great inventions that we now enjoy were all made fun of, all mocked because they began to make mention that things could be different. In the early 18 hundreds there was a bill in the United States House of Representatives that the U. S. Patent Office would be closed and the man from Connecticut, who made the motion, said everything that has been discovered has already been discovered and we don't need a U.S. Patent Office anymore. I need to remind you that we as Christians are not exempt from this human trait of being provincial and being introspective. That is the reason that we as Christians need to read the passage that I have read for you today on a regular basis because what Jesus said to these people who had probably never traveled more than thirty miles away from their house was, *I want you to keep looking over the horizon. I want you to start thinking of worlds you have never seen. I want you to go and tell people everywhere the story of Jesus Christ.* The reason that you and I need to keep reading this passage of scripture is that if we are not careful, we will start arguing too, over a road five miles out into a wilderness that we have never cut. Sometimes it is because we just don't have information.

You recall that these people lived around a body of water they called the Mediterranean. Mediterranean simply means the middle of the earth. They thought that everything around the world they could see and the Mediterranean was the middle of the world. It was even until the twelve hundreds that there was a Spanish coin that was found that had on it the Rocks of Gibraltar and in Spanish it said, simply translated, no more beyond.

These individuals were told to go to the end of the world and somebody said they believed they lived in a world that had an end. They simply did not know what was out there and many times we don't have a passion to see beyond the horizons because we really don't know what is out there.

I will always remember the story of the crusades and you remember one of them was called the Children's Crusade. Can you imagine going throughout Europe particularly in Austria and Germany gathering up the children and they were going to march them all the way to the Holy Land. They thought the children could make an impact upon the Muslims and be able to turn the land back over to Christians. If you parents have always wandered where it started, I wanted to tell you where this question started, because historians said the first night they started walking the question was, "Are we there yet?" They simply thought they could make it in about three days and they didn't know it was going to take months to be able to make it there.

Last summer when Judy and I went to Africa, one of the young adults came to my son in-law and said, "I see your parents are here from America." He said, "yes, they got in yesterday." He said, "Did they drive?" You see, that is not unusual for he had never seen a map in his life. How would he know?

I remember the first little church I ever had and it was time for the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering. The first sermon I ever preached about Lottie Moon, as I stood up to preach, I made the statement that people ought to give to missions and then I said, "There are people around the world who have never heard about Jesus." One of the leaders of the church came to me and he said, "You know, this is the first time you have

ever preached on the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering and I wanted to correct you.” He said, “You made the statement that people have never heard about Jesus. Let me ask you a question. Don’t you think everybody has heard about Santa Claus? If they have heard of Santa Claus, they have heard of Jesus. Therefore I am not going to give for surely, everybody has heard about Jesus.”

Do you understand that if you live in a small little world and I come to you and say go into all the world, there is going to be no driving passion because you can not invasion that world that is out there. But it is not even geographic, it is community. I was in a meeting this week. A man who lives in the inner city turned and looked at me and said “ Let me ask you who ministers in the suburbs,” and the sarcasm almost dripped. “Do your people know what it is like to live and to minister in Gilpin Court?”

One of the great challenges that Christians always have is to know the world in which we live. You and I had the opportunity a few moments ago to celebrate with one of our finest youth who is going to Argentina. Before we came in I had prayer with him and I said, “Aaron, I was with you in Tanzania last summer. What other countries have you been to?” This sophomore in the University of Richmond named eight countries that he has already ministered in. When I turn to a young man like Aaron and say, “The call of Christ is to go into all the world,” Aaron knows about the world.

Second reason you and I don’t go and feel the call of God upon our life is just sheer disobedience. Sometimes we hear what He says but then we don’t want to do what He says. One of my soul mates in ministry was involved in a country church. They came in and the first part of the ministry this friend of mine went to the church and went to the youth department and when they were there looked around and there were three teenagers. She went to them and said, “I wonder if we can have a youth choir!. They looked around and said three. She said, “If I get four I can have a quartet. They started. Twelve months later there were thirty-two kids in the youth choir. Then they decided that they wouldn’t invite them to come to Bible Study on Sunday morning. She went to the leader of the congregation. “Do you understand if we don’t take these kids and work them into Bible Study, the church won’t grow?” The leader of the church looked with all the sincerity of his life and said, “Who said we wanted to grow?”

If you think that is unusual, you haven’t been around many churches. Many churches say me, mine and ours and that is enough. When you begin to talk about trying to reach just the people who live three blocks away, who wants to go? I want to tell you what a lot of folk who come to Richmond are looking for. I know it because they keep telling me. I want a church that doesn’t have more than fifty in it. I want to ask you a question. If everybody is looking for that church which doesn’t have more than fifty in it, they are getting ready to have five hundred. How do you keep fifty? You just simply say this is what we want. We don’t want anybody else. If you think tribalism is in Africa, you ought to visit some Baptist Churches. When we say to folk you don’t have our kind of money, our kind of education, or the color of our skin, then we have become as tribal as any person in Africa.

I told you before about a friend of mine who was led to the Lord like Michael, he became so involved in the Christian faith, and he came to me one day and said, “I was raised in this community and there are a lot of kids out on the street. I want to ask you, if

I rent a school bus and go out on the street and meet these kids, I could bring them to church. I thought it was super, until he brought twenty-five.

One of the men that I am sure is in heaven now turned to me, [*I want you to think about all the things that are wrong with this statement*] and said, “They are going to mess up the walls of our church.” The young man who came with zeal and enthusiasm finally stopped bringing the bus because they might mess up the walls of our church. There is a third reason we don’t often do it and that is because the statement is often made, “We can’t afford it.”

We often run the lens of what God wants us to do through the financial prism. In our congregation, we have had ever since I have been here, some of the finest business men and women in the city of Richmond to guide the financial structure of our church. In twelve years, I have never had to worry, never had to stay up at night, because we have some of the finest people to guide us. But we must never get to the point where we start off by saying what can we afford and then has the question, what is God’s will? You have got to turn it around. You must ask the question “What is God’s will” and then depend upon God to help us to provide.

I can say on behalf of this congregation that for these forty-seven years, God has been faithful and He has provided when ever you have stepped out feeding that this is what God wants you to do. Several months ago I received a burden and I shared it with you and said, “Wouldn’t it be wonderful if we could provide ministry opportunities all summer long for kids in our community. We could take some of our young people and just have them work and get involved in ministry. I knew what I was saying. I knew that was going to take money and I knew it wasn’t in the budget. Let me just tell you that little burden. One of our kids is going to spend some time in Austria this year, one of our young people is going to spend time in China, Aaron is going to spend time in Argentina, and seven of our kids are going to work all summer long in ministries here in Richmond. All of those resources have been provided. If you had turned it around and said, “Do we have the money?” then not one of those kids would be working. If you said, “This is what God might want,” then the resources come from God. We must never get to the point where we diminish God’s claim on our life because we think we don’t have the resources.

I came to know a little bit more about this attitude of life when a man by the name of Maurice Keifley, we called him Mr. K. Mr. K. was one of those self made millionaire business men. When I became his pastor, he came to me and said, “I believe the church ought to be run like my business,” and I said, “Oh boy! here we go again.” Then he said, “In my business, we dream big, ” and I said “Oh! He said, “Here is a check for fifty thousand dollars, I want you to dream.”

I went to the congregation and I began to talk about things and the first question was, “Where is the money coming from.” I said, “The money has been provided.” Every year Mr. K. walked into my office and gave me the money. One year I was a little slow and Mr. K. came to me and said, “If you don’t hurry

up and do something, I am not going to give you anymore.” Have you ever had somebody who just put the money on your desk and said, “Dream.”

I want to remind that what these individuals understood was that they were to go and to break out of their little boundaries and to break out of their provincialism. Do you understand they were all Jews? An orthodox Jew would go home at night if he ever touched a gentile. He was saying I want you to touch them all around the world. They died all over the Mediterranean world because they believed what Jesus said. They went because how Jesus started and how He ended the command. Listen. “All authority has been given unto Me.” Do you know what that means? I am in charge of everything. I am in charge all around the world. I will convict, I will open doors, I will provide. A person who believes that, somebody said to me one day, is like going after Moby Dick and bringing your tartar sauce with you. If God is in charge, why not go. Then He said, I want you to know where ever you go, I am with you. Where ever you go I am with you.

In the city of Glasgow, Scotland there is a monument to men who died in the second World War. On that monument are these words. “Some men die by scrapnel some men go down in flames, but most men die inch by inch playing at little games.” Jesus Christ gave us the greatest commission ever given to a human. Go everywhere, to everybody and tell the story of Christ. Keep looking over the next horizon, keep dreaming, keep planning and I am there for you. I wanted to ask you if maybe the claim of the call of Christ ought not to come afresh on your life today. Maybe you have just settled in and a road five miles out in the wilderness sounds audacious and wasteless to you. Maybe it is time to let your eyes be open again.