

## **SERMON: 17 March 2019 – Rev Alistair Cowper**

**“Jesus wasn’t put off his mission. What about us?”  
(Luke 13:31-35 and Philippians 3:17-4:1)**

How can we live with a heavenly world view in a me first culture?

Jesus wasn’t put off his mission.

The Pharisees try to get him to go on the run, to put his own safety above the call to Jerusalem, the salvation of the world, and the bringing of the kingdom of heaven. Personal safety was not something Jesus allowed to get in the way of this great mission he was sent to begin.

No, despite threats to his life from an evil ruler he tells the Pharisees,

“I will keep on casting out demons and healing people today and tomorrow; and the third day I will accomplish my purpose”.

And what was his mission? To get to Jerusalem, to lay down his life for his friends (ie for everyone) and to rise again on the third day.

“Yes, today, tomorrow, and the next day I must proceed on my way. For it wouldn’t do for a prophet of God to be killed except in Jerusalem!”.

And why was this mission necessary? Because people had rejected the God who longed to gather them together and shelter them, like a mother hen protects her chicks.

Jesus wasn’t put off his mission. He knew where he was going and he knew how to get there. He knew the day was coming when he would enter into Jerusalem and the crowds would welcome him with those words of Psalm 118:26, words commonly associated with the entry of the priest into the Holy of holies, the most holy place in the Temple,

“Bless the one who comes in the name of the Lord. We bless you from the house of the Lord”.

On that first Palm Sunday, those words would ring in their ears as Jesus, the Priest-King, went on his way to the cross, taking with him the sins of the world

and emptying himself with every ounce of love that he had from God's infinite source.

In Philippians 3, Paul is critical of those who "think only about this life here on earth". Such people, according to Paul, are "enemies of the cross of Christ". Instead he urges his hearers to consider themselves as "citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives".

Followers of Jesus are to see themselves as citizens of heaven, where the Risen Lord Jesus lives. From the city of heaven they are to eagerly look for the Saviour, the Risen Christ, (some translations, like NIV, unhelpfully speak of eagerly awaiting the Saviour's return when there is no 'return' in the Greek).

One needs to always be looking for the Saviour and anticipating the time when Christ will change (transfigure) weak mortal bodies into glorious bodies like his risen body, and make all things subject to Christ.

Some have called this the Great Christ Project. I like the term 'Christening' the earth. We use that term when we talk about baptising a baby, we say, we Christen the baby. What we're effectively saying is we're making the baby subject to Christ, or we're filling the baby with Christ or we're desiring that the baby be one with Christ, or we're saying the child's true nature is Christ.

This is the great missional project that the church is all about, the making of the body of Christ.

We might put that another way, by saying that Christ is heaven-ing the earth. In other words, the things of heaven are consuming the earth, which is another way of saying that God's heavenly kingdom rule is spreading throughout the earth.

Christ is now our life. The old has gone, the new has come. This means that Christ enables people to see a better future and inspires people to work creatively to make it happen.

We should really say that Christ inspires people to work co-creatively, because God has made humans to be co-creators, with God, of a better world.

I think this is what it means, at least in part, to live as citizens of heaven; to see a better world through the eyes of Christ, eyes of compassion, justice and love.

I came across a great quote this week by a theologian called Ilia Delio who has written a book called *Christ in Evolution* (Orbis Books: 2008):

“Christ is the power of God among us and within us, the fullness of the earth and of life in the universe. [SLIDE] We humans have the potential to make Christ alive; it is what we are created for. To live the mystery of Christ is not to speak about Christ but to live in the surrender of love, the poverty of being, and the cave of the heart. If we can allow the Spirit to really take hold of us and liberate us from our fears, anxieties, demands, and desire for power and control, then we can truly . . . live in the risen Christ who empowers us to build this new creation.”

So where might we begin? How might we live with a heavenly world view and be builders with God of this new creation?

Here are a couple of stories that came to mind as I asked myself this question.

[1] I remember the young woman from Stirling, crippled by anxiety who for years couldn't face leaving the house. One day someone from the church dropped by and offered to take her out, to leave the security of her own prison and cross her threshold and venture out into what she saw as a big bad world. It turned out, with that simple help, the world wasn't such a bad place after all. And she's now enjoying a more normal life. For her she's discovered a better world thanks to a small act of kindness that made a big difference. That's the body of Christ growing.

[2] I remember also the lonely man who one day was invited to accompany a friend to a worship service in church, something he'd thought of doing for ages but couldn't get there himself, and who now can't stay away. He has found warmth and acceptance in a faith community that recognises there is a brokenness in all of us. He is being healed of his loneliness and the other 'stuff' in his life, and is beginning to live in the flow of God's generosity and love, serving others where he can. He too has discovered a better world thanks to the kindness of someone prepared to get alongside. Again, this is the body of Christ in action.

And at Alpha this week we were thinking about how God might guide us in life. And we watched a powerful little video clip about a former gangster Paul Cowley being led to show great kindness to the father he'd never really had.

[CLIP]

In conclusion, Jesus wasn't put off his mission. He kept on pursuing the heavenly agenda of God. And now he's given us the same power, the same Spirit, so that Christ is being formed in us and among us.

Now we're compelled by the Spirit of Christ to be builders of a better world, and to see and imagine the new creation breaking in, in the midst of our world.

Let's not be put off from any of that but rather let's keep on seeking the kingdom of heaven and keep on rejoicing in the glimpses we're already seeing.

*Thank you Lord, that you've chosen each of us to be part of your mission of love in this world. As citizens of heaven, we pray for opportunities, in this coming week, to extend the kingdom of heaven and grow the body of Christ.*