

Christmas Playlist, Week 3

GO TELL IT ON THE MOUNTAIN
John 8:36, Matthew 28:16-20, Luke 2:16-17

Imagine you're an African slave in America, around the time of the Civil War

- You're working out in the cotton fields
- The sun is beating down on you
- Biting horseflies are buzzing around
- Your fingers are bleeding, your back is aching
- You've been up since sun-up and you'll be out there 'til sundown.

You're oppressed. Your life is awful.

But then while you're out there working, somebody starts up a song – a spiritual song.

- It might be a song that tells a Bible story, like “Go Down Moses”
- It might be a song that looks forward to heaven, like “I've got a crown up in the Kingdom – ain't-a that good news”
- It might be a song that has a Christian meaning, but also has a coded message about how to escape from slavery:
 - “The Gospel Train” – a reference to the Underground Railroad
 - “Swing Low Sweet Chariot” – also about the Underground Railroad
 - “Steal Away” – describes how to sneak off at night
 - “Wade in the Water” – tells you to use creeks and rivers to hide your scent from bloodhounds
 - “Follow the Drinkin' Gourd” – a reference to the Big Dipper in the sky, which points north – this song contains detailed directions on how to escape and head north:
http://www.followthedrinkinggourd.org/What_The_Lyrics_Mean.htm

So you're out there working and the song starts up. And you join in singing. And your back still hurts, and you're fingers are still bleeding, but your spirit is lifted, because there's *hope*. You know that your precious Lord Jesus is gonna set you free. If not in this life, then certainly in the next.

And that hope gives you just enough strength to get through another day.

The song we're talking about today, “Go Tell it on the Mountain,” comes from that tradition. It's one of the African-American spirituals that were sung in the fields by people who were longing for freedom.

Do you know that we Christ followers have the greatest source of freedom there is?

So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

John 8:36

Years ago I sat in a maximum security prison. I was there with a prison ministry, sitting in a circle with a small group made up of both inmates and volunteers from the outside. I looked across the circle at one of the inmates. He could have been a murderer, an armed robber, a rapist – I don't know. What I do know is that he had given his life to Jesus Christ. And I heard him say, "People walking the streets are free on the outside – *but I'm free on the inside.*"

Jesus Christ is the greatest source of freedom there is. And yet all around us people living as slaves:

- Slaves to loneliness
- Slaves to despair
- Slaves to boredom
- Slaves to a dead marriage – or an abusive marriage
- Slaves to addiction
- Slaves to confusion, or loss of direction

All around us – your friends – your neighbors – your family members – are living as slaves. As former slaves ourselves who have found freedom in Jesus, our job is to "Go Tell it on the Mountain." Just like the slaves in the fields sang the spirituals to help other slaves find freedom, we have to help the slaves around us find freedom in Jesus

Take a look at Matthew 28:16-20. This takes place after the resurrection. Jesus has lived, taught, helped people, done miracles, died on the cross, risen from the dead. And then in this passage we have his final instructions to his followers.

16 Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. **17** When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.

You know what blows me away here? There is still uncertainty among the disciples! "*They worshipped him, but some doubted.*" There's the risen Jesus standing there right in front of them, and some of them are still not sure! In fact, the word "some" is actually not in the original Greek. So this might say, "*they worshipped, but doubted.*"

So we have these disciples who are worshipping AND wavering. I don't know about you, but I find some comfort in that. The call of Jesus does not come to perfect people who have it all together. It comes to weak, shaky, frightened people who worship – but also waver. People like me – maybe people like you.

Look at what Jesus says to followers like us:

18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Stop there for a second:

How much authority has been given to Jesus?

-Some authority?

- A little bit of authority? (ALL)

All authority where? (in heaven and on earth)

-That's pretty much the whole universe.

So understand that what Jesus is about to tell us to do is grounded in his authority as **Lord**.

A lot of you know what it means to be under authority. If you're in the military, you have to follow the orders of somebody in authority. If you have a job, unless you own your own business, there is somebody who has some authority over you. If you're a student your teachers have authority

I think we Christ-followers need to get a tighter grip on what it means to be under authority. ***The commands of Jesus are not suggestions!***

And here is the last command Jesus has given to us:

19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20** and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Let there be no question in our minds: Jesus commands us to GO.

In the Christmas story, what did the Shepherds do? As soon as they saw the baby Jesus, what did they do?

16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. **17** When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child

--*Luke 2:16-17*

Jesus is just a baby, and they've only just seen him, and already they're obeying the command to GO.

Jesus commands us to GO.

Let me show you something:

You can't spell "Gospel" without "Go"

You can't spell "Good News" without "Go"

You can't spell "God" without "Go"

There's no question that Jesus wants us to go. The question is HOW?

I'll be the first to admit that we Christ-followers have come up with some pretty strange ways to try and lead people to Christ.

Do you remember this guy?



His name is Rollen Stewart, and if you watched any football back in the 70's and 80's, you probably saw this fellow in the end zone jumping up and down, wearing a T-shirt that said "John 3:16" trying to get people's attention.

-I have no idea how many people he led to Christ, but I do know that he's in jail today, because he kind of went crazy and took a hotel housekeeper hostage, and he's serving a life sentence for kidnapping.

And then, there are the street preachers and sign-wavers.



My son encountered one of these guys when he was in college. David walked up to the guy and said, "Can I see your Bible?" He turned to Matthew 7 and read, "Judge not, lest ye be judged" (Mt. 7:1). David handed the Bible back and said, "Have you seen this?" The preacher replied, "Well, I've been perfected in the Lord, so I can judge other people." David said, "Really? You never sin?" The guy's response: "I'm not gonna listen to you 'cause you're a pervert!"

(I've known David for a long time, and I promise you he's not a pervert.)

And then there's this book that a friend of mine showed me, called *Soul Winning Made Easy*. This is from the chapter entitled, "How to Press for the Decision:"

“. . . press him to make a decision . . . **one way or the other.**

...silently start your countdown . . . 5-4-3-2-1. That's it. You wait no longer. Lay your hand on his shoulder . . . and with a semi-commanding voice say . . . "**Bow your head with me.**"

Note: Do not look at him when you say this. He won't act if you do. Instead, bow your head first... Out of the corner of your eye you will see him look at you with wonder. Then, as his resistance crumbles, his head will come down in jerks..."

--*Soul Winning Made Easy*, pp. 78-79

I'm really glad nobody tried that on me, 'cause I'm pretty sure I'd be a heathen right now.

OK seriously: How do we obey Jesus' command to go?

I'm gonna give you one simple word, and it's something every person in this room can do. A lot of you *have* done it. Some of you have done it, and you've seen somebody's life change. All because you did this one simple thing:

INVITE

A church growth expert named Win Arn did a survey of almost 10,000 Christians. He found that

- 2% first came to church because of an -- advertisement
- 6% came because a -- pastor invited them
- 6% came because of an organized --evangelism campaign
- 86% came because -- *friend or family member invited them.*

Christmas is a great time to invite people to church! And we at Main Street have created a tool to help you do that. As you leave the service today, the greeters will be handing you what we call "Invite Cards." On one side, these cards have information about our upcoming Christmas Eve services. On the other side, there's info about our regular

services. *These are not for you.* These are for you to give to friends, family, neighbors, co-workers as you INVITE them to church!

Jesus commands us to GO. Go in his name, and INVITE.