

John Wesley, stood by his fathers' deathbed as his father told him what he deemed the most important thing in his dying moments. He said, "The inward witness son, the inward witness - this is the proof, the strongest proof of Christianity."

In times of separation, death, or uncertainty, the most important things come out. Wouldn't it be nice if people could be consistent through life? To say, "I love you" to your loved ones daily. To encourage instead of degrade. That'd be nice. Many are consistent only in the negative, then scramble to make up for lost time. We opt for comfort instead of intimacy, the commonplace instead of risk in relationship.

Jesus was consistent and when he stood with the Disciples just before he ascended, as always, he said the most important thing.

Luke 24:36-53 (Mat 28:18-20) (Explain the setting).

³⁶ While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." ³⁷ They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. ³⁸ He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? ³⁹ Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have." ⁴⁰ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. ⁴¹ And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" ⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³ and he took it and ate it in their presence.

⁴⁴ He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."

⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. ⁴⁶ He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." ¹

While they're talking about something Jesus stands among them. What were they talking about? They were discussing all that happened. You remember, the angels said to the women at the tomb when they'd found it empty, "The Son of Man MUST be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again." Just before this passage it describes the two disciples who met Jesus on the road to Emmaus. Jesus said, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" These two men claim their hearts were burning in their chests as they spoke with Jesus on the road.

Have you ever listened to a sermon and had your heart burn? It happened to them. They were waking up; starting to see clearly. They'd been with Jesus, walked with him,

¹ *The New International Version*. 2011 (Lk 24:36–49). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

ate with him, talked with him, seen him heal, seen him crucified, watched him suffer, they knew him, but...they still didn't see clearly. They were going to start. They'd been touched by Jesus once, sometimes it only takes once, Paul was knocked off his horse, but these guys needed a second touch.

The truth is we often are like the blind man people brought Jesus to heal in Mark 8. He spits on the man's eyes and says, "Do you see anything?" The guy says, "I see people; they look like trees walking around." Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes again and his eyes were opened, his sight restored, and sees everything clearly.

Some see only in shadows, many of us never see Jesus clearly. We need a second touch to restore sight fully, but we've become comfortable seeing only in shadows. It seemed to happen to the disciples. Like the guys on the road to Emmaus their eyes were opened during this meal. They thought he was a ghost, but he opened their minds.

Jesus had suffered, been crucified, was resurrected, and now was about to be taken up and was meeting his disciples for the last time. Great passage, equally human, equally divine. He comes in, says he's not a ghost and then asks for something to eat – so human. Verses 41-43 are some of the most important verses in Scripture - ghosts don't eat fish. This tells us clearly, Jesus was resurrected physically! If you'd just been crucified and rose from the dead you'd be hungry too. There was a cartoon out a long time ago with Christ making a sandwich with the tomb in the background saying, "Dang, I am starved!" Couldn't you see him eating fish, licking his fingers and saying with a mouth half full, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."

Then he did something so divine only he could do, he opened their minds. You could almost see him finishing up his meal, licking his fingers, wiping his mouth, leaning over the table, they lean closer, drawn in, minds opened, eyes locked, and he says..."This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning with Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

I want to tell you about John and Charles Wesley. Charles wrote many of the hymns we know and love, John was the more outgoing of the two. John always described himself as 'the brand plucked from the burning'. They were in school in Oxford England in the 1700's and started a Bible study. It was unpopular, ridiculed by many, and given certain names: The Holy Club, The Sacramentarian's, The Bible Moths, The Bible Bigots and The Methodists. The Methodists stuck, arising from the same rigorous methods used at Oxford University they incorporated to study the Scriptures. This cost them reputation in many Christian circles; it took time to be accepted.

The pastorate was held in high honor then; John Wesley aspired to it. He made his mom proud; she could hold her head high. His ministry brought him to America, Georgia specifically, to start a ministry to Native Americans. But a failed romance attracted the wrath of a girl's father, a prominent local figure. He squashed John's ministry. John had to return to England. At the time, he would've considered himself a good Christian; did all the right things, was a pastor, educated well, knew the Scriptures. But something strange happened to John on the ship back to England. As they traveled a storm hit and they were tossed violently. John was terrified, but noticed a band of Moravian Christians in peaceful prayer on the ship. This struck him, where did they get such peace in uncertainty?

When he returned to England he wrote, "I went to America to convert the Indians; But O! Who shall convert me? Who, what is he that shall deliver me from this evil heart of unbelief? I have a fair summer religion. I can talk well; nay, and believe myself while no danger is near; but let death look me in the face, and my spirit is troubled. Nor can I say to die is gain...I show my faith by my works by staking my all upon it...O who will deliver me from this fear of death?" This was the beginning of John's second touch, until then he'd only seen in shadows, now he would see clearly! He realized his religion was based on works & intellect. A religiosity which served to comfort him, but of no use in a time of need. Faith without teeth.

Upon reaching England he met with another Moravian, Peter Bohler, who instructed him on Salvation by faith alone; John started to read Luther's commentary on the Galatians. He was then invited to a Moravian gathering and he wrote of the experience, "In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given to me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death." His brother Charles had the same experience 3 days earlier! Remember the two men on the road to Emmaus? Their hearts burned in their chests! This was John's conversion experience; at a quarter to nine he met Jesus in a Moravian meeting hall as his heart burned in his chest.

From that point on, John Wesley along with his brother changed. Preaching & priorities changed. Over the next 50 years he rood 250,000 miles across that countryside on his horse preaching over 42,000 sermons on salvation by faith and published 233 books. His sermons no longer the strict Methodist teaching of intellectualism, but now filled with life! Life which only comes through the Holy Spirit, filled with the grace, love, forgiveness, and reconciliation to God!

When he was refused the pulpit at his own dead fathers' church for lack of acceptance to his message, he promptly went to the graveyard and stood on his fathers' tombstone and preached 8 full nights on salvation by grace. Afterwards he went home and told his dying mother what happened. She died with a smile on her face. At the age of 86 he preached 100 sermons in 60 towns in 9 weeks! But he did not just preach, his desire

was to reform the nation. He involved himself in legal and prison reform, abolition of slavery, civil rights, and education. His last act was to write a letter to a William Wilberforce who was fighting in the Parliament to abolish slavery.

When he died on March 2, 1791 he merely said, "Farewell". Nothing left to say, no regrets. He'd consistently said the most important thing. Interestingly, a secular gentleman's magazine, one of his worst critics in life, said this about him, "Where much good is done we should not mark every little excess. The great point in which his name and mission will be honored is this: He directed his labors towards those who had no instructor; to the highways and hedges; to the miners in Cornwall and the colliers in Kingswood...By the humane and active endeavors of him and his brother Charles, a sense of decency, morals, and religion was introduced into the lowest classes of mankind; the ignorant were instructed; the wretched relieved and the abandoned reclaimed. Though his taste was classic, and his manners elegant, he sacrificed that society in which he was particularly calculated to shine; gave up those preferment's which his abilities must have obtained, and devoted a long life in practicing and enforcing the plainest duties. Instead of being an ornament to literature he was a blessing to his fellow creatures; instead of the genius of the age he was the servant of God."

What did Jesus say at the end? He said, "...repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." Reminiscent of the Great Commission. Jesus heart for the nations (define); every people group; The Sasak, the Batak, the Lampungese, the Burbur, the Siek and the people in Ardmore/Wynnewood/Havertown/Philadelphia. He never meant for the Church to be ingrown, in seclusion, or irrelevant. He meant for it to be a vital part society bringing the message of salvation by faith to all nations; all peoples. Out and about, involved, and relevant! In Matthew 24:14 he states, "And this Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to ALL NATIONS and then the end will come." In other words, he said My Kingdom for the Nations is the most important thing and I'm NOT coming back until the job is finished! By who? By Him. Through whom? Through His Church.

A recent survey was done by a pastor concerning what non-believers in America feel about the Church. One teenage boy summed it up by saying, "The Church is crap". America sees the church as invalid. Why? Maybe we see in Shadows. Secluded, cut off, in hiding, irrelevant, and uncaring. Seeking comfort, taking no risks. Christ said the important thing the day he left, to be bridge-builders, ministers of reconciliation. But the Church cocoons herself in safety, taking little risk. Many retired Christian men go through a spiritual dilemma. They've sought success in business, upon retiring they ask, what've I done with my life? On the deathbed, scrambling to say what was most important in the last few moments.

There're a few things the church says these days: be culturally relevant; package the Gospel in a way people can hear it, preach the Word, stay the course, preach heaven now. All necessary, but none will get the job done if we only see in shadows. Churches work hard at "equipping the saints"; classes, studies, seminars to teach strong theology.

A pastor recently realized that after about 5 years of this, which should've produced terrific results, people grew bored, uninterested. He did a survey, they said equipping was good, but they didn't know what they were equipped for. We see in shadows, we don't know what to do.

Teaching & ideas are good, but they don't replace Jesus' burning heart for the Nations! The Disciples' & John Wesley's hearts burned, it made a difference. Does your heart burn? Have you been struck with your need for Jesus & his heart for the world, or is it just a personal thing? His touch makes life full, things aren't so frightening, you're not bored, or dissatisfied, and in the end you can say, "Farewell, I have said the most important thing." It's interesting that Satan tempted Jesus with the "nations", perhaps he knew the Kingdom for all nations was at the center of Jesus' heart.

Over a meal of broiled fish Jesus said, 'and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in my name to all nations.' He promised the Holy Spirit to be with us to the very end of the age.

After his ascension, the disciples went back to the Temple to worship. A good thing. We're commanded to meet and worship together, but it's not where we live. It's where we're fed to go out and feed the nations. How do we do this at Six:Eight? We meet here Sunday mornings for corporate worship, prayer & teaching. We meet in Community Groups for deeper fellowship, accountability, and support. Through those groups we have our Community Partners where we engage with the practical needs of our neighbors in order to develop relationship and gain the voice of Jesus in their lives. Six:Eight is intentional about not keeping the Gospel to ourselves, because it wasn't meant to be - we earn the right to speak.

There is a place for you in Kingdom building, no matter age, personality, or status - everyone gets to play. Most of us aren't the John Wesley's of the world, that's okay; even he had his brother by his side for support. Jesus sent the disciples out in twos. We do kingdom in community for support & longevity. Bringing the Gospel to the world starting in Ardmore, to Philly, to Afghanistan, Pakistan, Indonesia, etc.

Wouldn't it be nice if the Philadelphia Inquirer wrote something like that magazine had written for John Wesley about the Six:Eight Vineyard Church. Maybe it would say, "Their name will be remembered. They directed their efforts towards their neighbor, the single mother & less fortunate in Delaware County. Six:Eight, introduced a sense of love & faith to us all; people were instructed; the hurting relieved, the abandoned reclaimed. Though they were well educated, they sacrificed the accolades their abilities could've obtained. They devoted themselves to service. Instead of being an ornament to common church culture, they were a blessing; instead of the non-relevant church of the age they were the servants of God by serving others."

But they already have said these things! Last year we received 4 awards from the community due to our service! And I expect that recognition will keep on coming, our

footprint will grow, and we will do our kingdom part in this corner of the world and beyond! Good job guys!