

# *Sermon Text for July 6, 2014*

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Ecclesiastes 1:12-14, James 3:1  
“Teaching what you’ve learned”

Of the 6 mission trips to Italy that I have been a part of this year’s had to have been the best group that I have had and we were involved in probably the most meaningful and lasting work of all the trips that we have done. It was an extraordinary experience on so many different fronts. We’ll touch on some of those during our time together this morning.

I did get a bit of reputation for not always having the exact information on all that we saw. When we were on Vesuvius Naomi and I were ahead of the group and we had a little time to kill so we came up with a story about this lost town, completely made up, and we told the group about this town and I presented it as if it were true. But as I was explaining the make believe town which was covered by Vesuvius and was never unearthed because a mafia boss owned the land a refused to allow people onto his property for fear that the state would seize his property...it was a good story, very convincing, I noticed that there were other groups walking by us and they were stopping and listening and taking pictures and nodding their heads as I told the story. They totally bought into it. They didn’t have the benefit of the explanation that we had made up the story that our group received when we got on the bus. Oliveuum just might become a real place as a result of what we taught.

It does make us realize, though, that those who teach can potentially have a lasting impact and James tells us today that we could even have an eternal impact, which ought to raise the stakes for all of us. When we go on mission trips, we go with the understanding that what we are doing can have an eternal impact on those with whom we come into contact. It isn’t a vacation, it is a vocation, a calling to put ourselves last and put the witness of Jesus Christ first in our words and our actions. That responsibility is on us and at times it can weigh heavily.

As a church our primary responsibility is to teach the Word of God and as James continues to remind us that this teaching has to take the form of action, of doing, but it is teaching nonetheless. We are back in James today and we are going to touch on 1 verse which refers to teachers and how those who teach will be held to a higher standard. May God help us all for as members of the body of Christ we are all teachers and we will all be held to a higher standard.

On our flight to JFK to Dublin each seat was equipped with its own screen and you could choose from 50 or more movies what you wanted to watch. I chose the way back to watch Troy and it was basically about Achilles who refused to fight and be loyal to any one King, but rather

could be convinced to fight by the fact that this war would be remembered forever and his name would be eternally written on the history books as the greatest warrior of all time. He was only willing to participate if he was involved in something eternal, it had nothing to do with the king under whom he was fighting. He was willing to fight for eternal recognition.

The author of Ecclesiastes whose name is Qoholeth which means preacher, tells us today that as he has looked around him all of man's striving and work is nothing but vanity because none of it has eternal meaning. Nothing we do has an eternal impact. It is a bit of a cynical viewpoint, but I think of the places that we visited that have been around for thousands of years: Pompeii, Pantheon, Coliseum, impressive as they were, but they had their day in the sun and their season, and now the only purpose they serve is to bring in revenue to the Italian government. It is all vanity with no lasting impact.

Then I thought about the work which we did as we taught VBS. How many of those 50 or so kids will in any way be affected eternally by our teaching? You need to know that it is not easy to get access to public schools in Italy to do this kind of program. There is a lot of justified hesitation and skepticism to allow Protestant Church group to come in and expose them to your children. This place is dead...

After the first day the main teacher came up to me and said: "You need to remember that you are not here on a mission, you are here on a cultural exchange where you can teach the kids the general principles of friendship, tolerance, peace, unity, but you are not here to impose your religious beliefs on our kids. This happens every year after day one, usually a priest stops in and we have a chat and it defuses the situation. But this year it was a bit different. I felt a burden this year. When he spoke to me in this way, I recognized that we were, in fact, not being deliberate enough in what we were teaching where the eternal message of Jesus Christ and the importance of having a personal relationship with him was able to shine forth.

From that second day on every opportunity to teach about a personal relationship with Jesus Christ that we had we took. When their teachers went on a cigarette break in the middle of the classes that we taught, we spoke of the love that God had for them in His son Jesus Christ. It was then that we realized that our goal was not just to just give them hope and a few smiles for the week but rather an eternal message that would impact them for the rest of their lives.

James in our Scripture today teaches us so clearly that those of us who are placed in that role of teaching Jesus Christ, as we all were on that mission trip, have to recognize the responsibility that comes with taking on that challenge. Not many of you should become teachers. Why not? The assumption is that in the early church many wanted to be in the position of the teacher of the Gospel because it carried some advantage. For some being a teacher, or a pastor or preacher, was a tremendous ego trip.

Rabbi in Hebrew means literally: “My great one”, and the interests of the rabbi were said to be of more importance than that of your own parents. There was a 1<sup>st</sup> century writing that said if your parents and your rabbi were held hostage you should work for the release of your rabbi first, then work on your parents’ release.

We had an incredible experience in Albanella and for me personally it was a walk back into celebrity status. They greeted us like royalty. The government officials for the first time in the 110 year history of the church were present in the church and greeted the community. They held a massive celebration with balloons and banners for us and the entire village showed up and celebrated our presence. There was a definite rush of recognition that these Americans in our midst are something special. They even took us to their weed forest which they were very proud of.

It was an amazing opportunity where they made me promise in front of the government leaders and the church and the community that when we came back in 4 years we would do VBS in that community. It stroked all of our egos. It made all of us feel very good and very important. Not many should become teachers, because no profession is liable to beget spiritual and intellectual pride as much as this one. Daily we must ask ourselves the question of is our vocation for the sake of the kingdom of God and passing on eternal truths for the ages to come, or are we not all a bit like Achilles not loyal to any king, not even the King of Kings, but our interests lie in our own comforts, our own name being recognized, our work a means to let our own desires be satisfied.

James in chapter 1 is very direct in the second part of the verse. He is not trying to discourage us from becoming teachers of God’s Word, but rather wanting to make us discern why we would want to be teachers in the first place. He includes himself when he states: “We who teach will be judged more severely.” He includes himself in that category of teachers lest anyone would try to accuse him of hypocrisy. He tells us, church, we are all in this together, and this is serious business. It isn’t something you can turn on one day and then when you get back from your mission trip you can turn it off again.

If what we teach is Jesus crucified and raised from the dead, and our agenda slate is clean then our judgment will be based on that. But when we begin to intermingle cultural agenda or personal agenda in our teaching, then we will be judged on that as well.

Each one of us is called to be aware of the lasting impact that our teaching needs to have on others. At the same time we need to be aware that we will be judged more severely if we wander away and include elements that lift up our own agenda or our own name as being equally important to the name and agenda of our Savior Jesus Christ. May God bless us as we teach that which we have been taught by His Holy Word. Amen.