

Disciple Making

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[0 : 00] I have been advertising in the newsletter that starting today, I would begin a series of sermons on this whole matter of wineskins.

In the second chapter of Mark, Jesus speaks about the fact that we cannot put new wine into old wineskins. And I was going to do a series there where I was going to develop what is the new wine that is permeating in our life here and what are the new wineskins that are needed to contain that. But for a number of reasons, I'm not going to do that. It doesn't feel like the right time, and I can't see the people in the front row. It doesn't feel like the right time to do the wineskins passage. In fact, it feels that perhaps the best way for me to deal with that passage is through an essay that I can write and that we can grapple with and get feedback on. Instead, I sense that what I need to do is a review.

Then I need to go back and highlight again some of the things that we were emphasizing last year. And so I'm asking you to turn to two passages in the Gospel of Matthew.

[1 : 18] Matthew chapter 4, verses 12 through 22, and Matthew 28, verses 16 through 20. If you are able, will you please stand for the reading of the Gospel?

Hear the Word of God. Now when Jesus heard that John the Baptist had been taken into custody, he withdrew into Galilee.

And leaving Nazareth, he came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, saying, The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles.

The people who are sitting in darkness saw great light. And to those who were sitting in the land and shadow of death, upon them a light dawned.

From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near. And walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen.

[2 : 35] And he said to them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men and women. And they immediately left the nets and followed him.

And going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James, the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. And they immediately left their boat and their father and followed him.

And then at the end of Matthew, But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated.

And when they saw him, they worshipped him. But some were doubtful. Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you, and look, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

[3 : 47] Spirit of the living God, we believe that long ago, you inspired Matthew the tax collector to write down these words for us.

As you know, they're very familiar words to us. And so I pray in your mercy and grace, you would cause them to come alive for us as never before.

For we pray this in Jesus' name and for his glory's sake. Amen. You may be seated. I'm asking, why are we as a church here in this city?

Why does God have us here in this place at this time in history? If we were to make a sign and put it out in front of the church buildings, and if this sign had the sentence, We exist to, what would it say?

We exist to what? What should the sign say? Bottom line, why are we here?

[4 : 54] I think we need to keep asking this question because it is so easy to lose our way. It is so easy for churches and for those in church leadership to lose their way, to get sidetracked, to get sidetracked, to get bogged down.

Lots of churches have lost their way. Lots of churches are bogged down, and that is why God is raising up all kinds of new churches around them.

Why are we here? We exist to do what in this city?

In my mind, one of the most significant events of 1995 was the bankruptcy of Smith Corona Company. You know the name Smith Corona.

For well over a hundred years, known for excellence in typewriters, I went through college with a Smith Corona portable typewriter. Why did this solid, well-managed firm go bankrupt?

[6 : 09] For two reasons. The first reason is the obvious reason, and it is that Smith Corona did not own up to the fact that the world is changing. Smith Corona thought that it could keep pace with the world by simply making more and better typewriters.

Smith Corona did not recognize the powerful transformation in our culture due to PCs, personal computers.

The second reason goes deeper, and it is that Smith Corona did not understand its mission correctly. Smith Corona thought that it was in the typewriter business.

It failed to see its real mission, its real mission was to enable verbal communication to happen.

Smith Corona was in the making communication happen business.

It got stuck in the means and missed the end. They defined the mission incorrectly and are now being left behind.

[7 : 20] Theodore Levitt, in a Harvard Business Review article, calls the Smith Corona phenomena marketing myopia. Marketing myopia.

Not seeing the real mission. Levitt explains the trouble for the railroads in the same light. The railroad business declined not because there was no longer any need for the railroads, but because the railroads misdefined their mission.

The railroads thought they were in the railroad business. They were not. They were in the transportation business. Levitt says Hollywood almost lost it too.

You realize that? When the televisions came along, when TV came along, many of the studios almost went belly up. And they would have gone belly up had they not recognized that they had defined their mission wrong.

They had defined their mission as being in the movie making business. They were not in the movie making business. They were in the entertainment business.

[8 : 33] I, as a pastor, do not want to find myself in Smith Corona's place. Many pastors and many churches are in Smith Corona's place.

In order to avoid that, we have to do what Smith Corona did not do. First of all, we have to own the fact that the world has changed.

And is changing. It isn't going back to the way it was in the 60s. It isn't going back to the way it was in the 70s.

It isn't going back to the way it was in the 80s. It isn't going back to the way it was in the early 90s. It isn't going back. We have to own that the world has changed.

And we have to have an accurate definition of what we are about. What business, if you will, are we into here? Well, the world is changing in profound ways.

[9 : 43] We could spend the rest of the day talking about all the changes in the world. What is of particular importance for us today is to realize that we in the West, we in North America, are now living in one of the greatest mission fields in the world.

We are living in the greatest mission field in the world. not because of the large number of immigrants. That's part of it.

God has brought the world to our doorstep, and so in that sense, it is a large mission field. But that's not the point I want to make today. Even if we had not experienced this great immigration of other peoples, this would still...

...great mission field because of the secularization of the West. We used to be able to speak of the Christian West and the pagan East.

No more. In the 50s and in the 60s, when churches like GPC mushroomed to 3,000 people in no time at all, the church could assume that the surrounding culture was basically Christianized, right? [11:17] In the 50s and 60s, you could make that assumption that the surrounding culture basically supported what we were doing. Maybe the whole of the culture didn't believe everything we believed and didn't support everything we were doing, but we could assume that it was basically propping us up.

Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts arose during that time and basically was supporting what we were doing in the Sunday schools. I've told you before, that I learned the Christmas carols in public school in Los Alamos, New Mexico.

That's why I learned to sing, Veiled in flesh, the Godhead see, Hail the incarnate deity. I did not learn that in Sunday school. In Sunday school, they thought that was too much for us, but they did teach it in public school.

I learned to sing, O come, O come, O come, all ye faithful, O come, O come, how's it go? All ye faithful. Well, the next line will explain why I didn't get it right.

I learned to sing, O come, all ye faithful, in Latin, in junior high in Solana Beach, California. No more.

[12:32] Christendom, as it was called, is gone. Christendom is that social context in which the church sets the agenda.

Christendom is over. We have to come to terms with that. William Williman of Duke University suggests that it ended in 1963.

It ended in 1963 because, he says, in Greensboro, North Carolina, for the first time, the theaters showed movies on Sunday night. And what he said happened there was, when the theaters showed movies on Sunday night, the culture was saying to the church, we are no longer going to prop up your agenda.

You're on your own. We live in a secular world now. And we have to come to terms with that. Sociologists tell us that there are 120 million Americans who are secularized.

120 million people in America who do not even have a clue about what we're saying in this room right now. George Hunter of Asbury Seminary says that these secular people are not atheists.

[13:59] There's all kinds of gods out there. They're not agnostics. They believe in something. They are ignorists. Not ignoramus.

That's a put down. They are ignorists. They do not know what we are talking about. For some, there is this distant memory about a Moses.

You ever heard about a Moses? Ten Commandments. There's baby Jesus and something about a second coming. But for all practical purposes, they have no clue to the life-changing, life-giving person of Jesus Christ.

Overnight, the mission sending west has become the great mission field. that's why the immigrants come.

Not to bring the mission to the doorstep of the American church, but to pick up where the American church hasn't been doing the job. But in many ways, then, we are in the same situation the first Christians were.

[15:21] In many ways, we are back to the first century, which is wonderfully exciting. In the first century, the church could not count on the culture to prop it up. The culture didn't know what it was talking about then either.

The culture in the first century was wonderfully pluralistic, more so than now. It was a culture that was groping for something. And that's where we are now.

It's an exciting time to be alive. So, why are we here? What business are we in in this secular world?

Well, it seems to me the best thing to do is ask the chairman of the board. Huh? Let's ask the CEO of the company. what business we're in.

According to Jesus, who claims to have all authority in heaven and on earth, we are in the disciple-making business. Go make disciples of all the nations.

[16:29] Bottom line, disciple-making, people-building, and it is so easy to lose our way.

You see, it is easy to slip into thinking that we are in the building bigger churches business. And that the goal of all we do is to make bigger churches.

This is especially so in our culture where success is measured with numbers and bigness. when we begin to define our mission in those terms, we begin to compromise for one thing and we begin to focus on programs.

You have to have a program for this, a program for that, a program for that, a program for that, and before we know it, the church leadership gets caught up in the mode of program survival.

I'm dead serious. We gather to make decisions and it's based on how can we keep the program alive. We are not in the building bigger churches business.

[17 : 47] We are in the building bigger people business. Now, if we do the task well, churches will get bigger and bigger.

In fact, if we did the task well, churches would double every two years. But that would be the consequence, not the purpose.

The church is simply a community of disciples. More specifically, a community of disciple-making disciples. Richard Halverson, who was the retired chaplain of the U.S.

Senate, regularly makes a distinction between church work and the work of the church. And he says that it is so easy to move from the work of the church to church work.

Now, don't get me wrong. Much church work is necessary to enable the work of the church. But it is so easy to get stuck in church work and never get to the work of the church.

[19 : 06] As George Hunter says, Christianity was launched as a movement of fishers of men, men, and today we are keepers of the aquarium. We are not in the keeping aquarium business.

You know what kills pastor's spirit more than anything else? Is he gets saddled with keeping the aquarium together? That's not the business we're in. We are in the business of fishing for men and women, helping them become and then grow and function as disciples of Jesus Christ.

I could use an amen about now to see if I'm... Okay. See if we're tracking here. I don't want to get caught where Smith Corona got caught.

You don't either, do you? Okay. Let me now just for the next few moments just ask a series of questions. The first is what is a disciple?

If that's the business we're in, what is a disciple? Put simply, a disciple is a learner, a disciple is a follower. Jesus' call upon our lives is pretty straightforward.

[20 : 43] Come, follow me. Get up from your seat, get in line behind me, and let me teach you a whole new way to live.

Now, as I emphasized last fall, every person is a disciple. Every human being is a disciple. Every secular human being is a disciple of someone or of some ideology.

We are all followers. Every great leader in the world is a follower of someone. Madonna is a disciple. Jerry Garcia was a disciple.

Cal Rifkin, Jr., Karim Abdul-Jabbar, Deion Sanders are all disciples. Bill Clinton, Bob Dole, Ross Perot are all disciples. Michael Eisner is a disciple and is making millions of disciples of someone. So the question is never, will I be a disciple? The question is always, whose disciple will I be? Why be a disciple of Jesus?

[21 : 54] When someone asks you that question, how do you answer? Why should I bother being a disciple of Jesus? Jesus? This is how I answer. I want to be his disciple for one reason, and it is that there is no one else in the universe like him.

Simple as that. There's no one else in the universe like Jesus. No one said the things Jesus said. No one did the things Jesus did. There was no one like him.

He is the creator come into the world in our flesh and blood. He is the one and only God-man. He is at once fully human and fully divine.

In him I see who God is, and in him I see who we were created to be. He is what it means to be human. He is the perfect human. Who else should I follow? No one says what Jesus says.

No one does what Jesus does. No one else has said to me, I'll die in order that you might live. No one else has said to me that I will conquer all the forces against you and set you free to live.

[22 : 57] Who else will I follow? The question is never will I be a disciple. The question is always whose disciple will I be? Which explains the tension in our lives.

We are trying to be the disciples of more than one master. No. No. It doesn't work.

It can't work. I submit to you that most of the frustration and emptiness we Christians experience is simply due to the fact that although we want to follow Jesus down his road to the life he gives, we also want to follow other masters down another road to the life they give.

life. Sometimes those roads will merge and most of the time they do not. I'm coming to realize that many churches are in the business of bringing comfort to people on Sunday so that they can continue living for their idols Monday through Saturday.

Now, no church in their right mind is going to write that on the bulletin. But it is the way it is. We come to church on Sunday to get a little spiritual boost so that we can go on Monday through Saturday living fundamentally secular lives.

[24 : 43] We should just be honest and say that we have gathered here to get pumped up, feel good, so we can go out and serve the other gods.

What does the disciple of Jesus look like Monday through Saturday? I know what the disciple of the American dream looks like. Pretty weary, pretty frazzled, and very, very anxious right now.

What does the disciple of Jesus look like? Now, the answer to that question is found by asking yet another, and this question is, what is Jesus up to in his disciples?

disciples? He calls us to follow, to get in line behind him and follow him down the road. What is Jesus up to in the disciples who follow him?

What is he about? May I submit to you that that is the key question for the church to keep asking, especially in an ever-changing world. What is Jesus up to?

[26 : 01] Not what is the pastor up to, not what is the elder up to, not what is the denomination up to. What is Jesus up to? Try this on. Lynn, will you help me here?

He's up to a number of things. First of all, he is constantly drawing us to himself. Constantly. Drawing us to himself.

Follow me, he says. Not follow religion, not follow philosophy, not follow principles to live by, not attach yourself to an institution, not even follow the movement.

Follow me, attach yourself to me. He calls us into friendship. He calls us into relationship. Follow me. And he's constantly doing that. Second, in drawing us to himself, he thus draws us to the Father.

How could it be otherwise? Makes sense, doesn't it? Given the fact that for Jesus, the most significant relationship in his life is his relationship with the Father. Take my yoke upon you, he says.

[27 : 08] My yoke, the yoke that I myself wear. What is Jesus' yoke? It is his relationship with his Father. And Jesus' great passion is that you and I know his Father the same way he knows him.

That we come to love his Father the same way he loves him. That we come to trust his Father the same way he trusts him. It's what we were made for. From all eternity, there's this relationship between the Father and the Son.

Out of it we were made. For it we were made. And Jesus is constantly drawing us to himself and thus to his Father. Third, he is breathing his life into us.

Ah, take a deep breath. He is breathing his life into us. And his life is a person, the Holy Spirit. Jesus' passion is to fill us with what fills him.

To fill us with what fills him. The very energy that animated his body while on earth, he now pours into us to animate our bodies.

[28 : 15] The Holy Spirit is the embodiment of the love between the Father and the Son. And Jesus breathes that love into us. And that joy and that power into us. He comes to take up residence in us.

Fourth, through the indwelling presence of the Spirit, Jesus is forming his character in us. Forming his character in us, which is going to result in a lifestyle change.

Lifestyle comes out of character. He is reproducing his character traits in us. This is what Paul means by, I think, what he means by the fruit of the Spirit. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

In everything, he's using everything in our lives to further shape his character into us. Fifth, he is teaching us to see everything, ourselves, the world, the Father, from his perspective.

We have to get this. Jesus' great passion is that we see clearly. That we be freed from all powers of deceit and darkness so that we can have our eyes open to see reality as it is and so that we can see in reality, see reality shot through with the presence of God.

[29 : 36] He wants us to be able to walk in the office tomorrow and see what is true about the office. That God is there. Sixth, he's working to help us see so that we can feel what he feels for us and for the world.

I'm using this word feel very intentionally. That's because we follow a living Lord whose love for us has feeling in it. It's full of passion.

He aches for the world the way it is. He aches for the world in its ignorance and rebellion and he aches over us disciples, especially when we are unable to come to him because we are overcommitted to the other lords.

He wants us to see as he sees and he wants us to feel as he feels. So that seventh, we will want to join him in his ministry in the world.

To especially join him in calling people into the adventure of following him. Every person we meet is following someone and Jesus wants to help us see those persons as he sees them and to feel for those persons as he feels for them so that we will join him in calling them to follow the only one who has life.

[31 : 12] This is the great privilege of discipleship. To join the Savior of the world in his ministry in the world. His ministry is a full-orbed ministry.

It has as many facets as the full scope of human need. And the beauty of it is, is that he has made each of us uniquely, gifted each of us uniquely, to join him in a particular part of his ministry in the world.

And the promise is, is that as we follow him, he shows us our unique giftedness and then he empowers us to play our part. Which means, to be a disciple of Jesus is to be in ministry with Jesus.

I say that again. To be a disciple of Jesus is to be in ministry with Jesus. Or to put it this way, to be a disciple of Jesus is to be a missionary.

A person on a mission. The question for disciples then is never, will I be in ministry? Invalid question.

[32 : 26] Computer doesn't compute on that. The question is never, will I be in ministry? The question is always, what is the unique ministry to which he's called me? Or to put it differently, the question is never, am I going to be a missionary in this secular culture?

But always, what is the missionary role to which he has called me? What's Jesus up to in his disciples?

Drawing us to himself and thus to the Father, breathing his life in us, forming his character in us, teaching us to see everything from his perspective so that we will feel for one another and for the world as he feels so that we will want to join him in his ministry in the world.

I think you can see then that in all that he is up to in the life of a disciple, Jesus is meeting the deepest of human needs. In drawing us to himself and to the Father and breathing his spirit in us, he is, can you put that up, the next one up there, Lynn?

In those first three, what he's doing is meeting the great need for relationship and intimacy. In breathing his spirit into us, he's meeting the great need for vitality and freshness.

[33 : 51] In forming his character in us, he's meeting the great need for transformation. In helping us see, he's meeting the great need for vision. In helping us feel, he's meeting the great need to have hearts that are alive.

And in calling us into ministry, he's meeting the great need to have meaning in life, to be able to make a contribution. I'm going to say more about that next week.

You can turn that off. What I've emphasized in these last few minutes is what Jesus is doing in his disciples. And I can't stress that enough.

The issue is what Jesus is doing in his disciples. The question then, the final question is, what's our part in that? And it seems to me, our part is simply to cooperate with him.

Discipleship fundamentally is cooperation. Cooperating with him in what he is doing in us. How do we do that?

[35 : 00] We do it by yielding to him. We do it by opening up to him and letting him work in us. And we do it by choosing the kinds of activities that are consistent with what he is doing in our lives.

By putting ourselves into the places where he can work this work. Example. We cooperate with him by honoring the Lord's day.

And by setting it aside as the day for worship and for study. We cooperate with him by choosing to put ourselves in teaching contexts where the word of God is being opened to us.

We cooperate by choosing to then get into accountability relationships with a handful or two of other disciples. And we cooperate with him by developing a daily routine.

A daily routine. A meeting along with him in prayer and in Bible study. You can see from that that the key word in all of that was the word time.

[36 : 12] And this doesn't seem to be getting through to us. Discipleship equals time. There's no substitute for time.

Now, what I will emphasize then is that what happened here? The mic switched off or it's going down? The battery is? Do I have to use this one? I'm talking too long, so why?

What I want to emphasize then at this point is that being about the kinds of activities that are consistent with what he's doing in our life doesn't mean adding to our already overcrowded schedule.

In order to be about those kinds of activities, we're going to have to subtract. Subtract. We're going to have to make adjustments, major adjustments, in our other commitments.

Where are we going to find the time to be about those activities? I'll tell you one source. I just read that the average American adult spends 30 hours a week in front of the television.

[37 : 29] I don't know about you, but I would imagine there are some are shaking yes and some are shaking no. There's time.

It's interesting. Someone recently observed that more evangelical Christians can tell you the lineup for the fall season on NBC than can tell you the order of the books in the New Testament.

This is the mistake that I have made all of my Christian life. that I thought I could add these activities without subtracting. And so I look just as insane and frazzled as the secular world.

Cooperating with Jesus in the work he wants to do in us means making major adjustments. It means we're going to have to say no to some other masters. Why are we here?

What business are we in? We are in the cooperating with Jesus business as he seeks to build big people.

[38 : 49] We are in the making disciples business. Everything we do in this church must be judged by that.

Is it making disciples or not? Well, what should we do today? I'm going to suggest that we have a time of reaffirmation of our baptismal vows.

Baptism initiated us into this journey of discipleship. And I'm going to ask us to reaffirm the vows that were taken for us or by us. And I'm going to ask you to do it this way, to come forward.

There are going to be a number of teams up here and there will be some teams in the balcony, to come forward to receive the sign of the cross with oil.

And that is a sign of the anointing power of the Holy Spirit to live the life of discipleship. I'm going to suggest that in doing this we are doing three things.

[39 : 53] We are first of all saying, yes, Jesus, I am yours. Second, we are saying, yes, I want you to do in me all that I saw in the overhead.

And third, we are saying, I will make adjustments in my life that you call me to make. You do not have to come forward.

And no one will judge you if you don't during this time. But I think it can be a physical way to practically say, yes, Jesus, I'm going all the way.

All right? This will take a little while. And we're going to worship during this time and see what the Lord does with us.