

A Vision of the Church in Mission and Ministry

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[0:00] It's, yeah, it's lovely to be here with you. I visited Learners' Exchange for the first time two weeks ago, and I was very sad that I'd been here for five years and I hadn't come at all. It was wonderful.

And this is likely to be my last Learners' Exchange because we leave for South Africa in two weeks' time. So it's a privilege to be here with you. But it's really struck a chord with me, and if the church that I'm going to is willing, I'd love to do something like this.

I've not been in any other churches before that do something like this, and it's so wonderful. So thank you for introducing this to me. I apologize. I might be reading a lot of this.

I wrote it recently and haven't had time to really polish it off. But I'll try to read it with as much gusto and eye contact as I can manage.

But in light of my oncoming curiosity, I thought I'd share something with you that has been on my heart and mind over the last few months as I've been thinking about what it means for us to be the church.

[1:12] What does it mean for me to be a pastor in the church? And then particularly, kind of zooming in on that, what does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus?

And what does it look like to live life together as disciples? And chatting recently to a friend of mine, asking him if he knew any good books on discipleship that I could read.

And one that I have read recently, Life Together by Bonhoeffer, which was a wonderful, wonderful journey for me. First time I'd read it. And one of those books that I feel like you have to read every year and kind of soak on it for a while.

So hopefully I'll be reading that many times more. But other than that, we couldn't really think of any particular books that came to mind until a few weeks ago I came across a lecture by Daryl Johnson in which he, the lecture was titled Matthew as a Discipleship Manual.

Looking at the Gospel of Matthew and offering that as one of the best sources we could read if we were interested in discipleship and what that looked like.

[2:20] So I thought this morning, I initially thought I'd share some reflections on ecclesiology from some of my papers at Regent. But as I was reading them, they were decidedly dry.

And I thought that would not be very edifying to any one of us, including myself. So the past few weeks, the past two weeks in particular, I've been reading through the Gospel of Matthew and reflecting on it, in particular in light of Daryl Johnson's lecture as well.

So a lot of what I share this morning are my reflections of my two weeks of study in Matthew. But also I'm very indebted to Daryl Johnson for the outline that is given of the Gospel of Matthew and also of what we see about discipleship in the Gospel of Matthew.

So I commend that lecture to you. It's available at Regent. You can ask me about it. But that's been wonderful resources I've studied through the Gospel of Matthew. So, as I've said, these are not scholarly reflections in the sense of thoroughly researched with footnotes, but they are my earnest reflections as I've studied through the Gospel of Matthew.

We probably won't be doing any moon landings or atom splitting, but sometimes coming back to the basics is what we need.

[3:45] And we're going to walk... What I'm going to try to do is just walk through the whole of the Gospel of Matthew, look at it from a bird's eye view. And doing that for me gave me a fresh perspective on discipleship.

And I hope that it'll leave something with you, even if you want to go home and read through the Gospel of Matthew again. This has been immensely helpful to me. So, to begin with, I just briefly want to look at the context of Matthew, and then we'll jump into Matthew itself, which I think will be

fun.

But a little bit of homework before we do that. It might be helpful to understand something about the context into which Matthew wrote his Gospel. It's impossible to be certain, of course, but it's likely that Matthew is writing to a community in transition.

Perhaps even a community in crisis. Given that the Gospel emphasizes both Jesus' opposition with the Pharisees, remember the woe to you Pharisees, as well as the disciples' mission to the Gentiles, go to all the nations.

It suggests that the Gospel was written at a time when the church and the synagogue had been separated and were now in conflict as to who were the true successors of the Old Testament promises.

[5 : 05] Matthew's community is likely comprised mostly of Jews who formerly regarded themselves as a renewal movement within Judaism. But due to increasing hostility between themselves and Pharisaic Judaism, as well as the seeming failure of their mission to the Jews, they find themselves ostracized from their Jewish community.

And they've now probably settled in Syria predominantly a Gentile community. And now they are seeking to come to grips with their identity and their mission.

Who are they? And what have they been called to do? The South African missiologist David Bosch argues that into this context, Matthew is writing not simply to offer a life of Jesus account, but to provide guidance to his community on how it should understand its identity and its mission.

Therefore, David Bosch writes, in the midst of confusion and uncertainty, Matthew's community is driven back to its roots, back to the persons and to the experiences which gave birth to it, so that it can rediscover and reclaim those persons and events, come to a more appropriate self-understanding.

And on the basis of this, remembering who they are in Jesus and what they're called to, on the basis of this, discern the nature of their existence and calling.

[6 : 43] So as we look at that Gospel of Matthew, thinking that in a way, Matthew is writing this to say, this is who you are, disciples of Jesus. This is your calling.

Go and make disciples. A good place to start is at the end. The well-known Great Commission in Matthew. I'm aware that most of you probably don't have Bibles in front of you, so I've got a lot of the Scriptures on here.

When we come to a long Scripture, I'll just, I'll pop it up here. But we begin at the end with the Great Commission. Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus directed them.

And when they saw him, they worshipped him. But some doubted. And Jesus came to them and said, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

[7 : 55] And surely I am with you to always, to the very end of the age. In the semantics of the passage, Jesus seems only to be addressing the eleven disciples.

But in the logic of the passage, Jesus is clearly addressing all those who are to come. All who are to become his disciples. The eleven disciples are, after all, called to make more disciples of Jesus. And these more disciples are to be baptized in the name of the Trinity and to be taught all that Jesus has taught the eleven. Including this. Therefore, the bearers of this commission are the whole people of God.

Including you and I. Jesus is speaking to us when he commissions us. And what is the nature of this mission? The verb to make disciples in verse 19 is the main verb onto which the baptizing and the teaching are subordinate.

These subordinate participles indicate what's involved in discipleship. But it's clear that for the Gospel of Matthew, mission is discipleship.

[9 : 09] Making disciples. Now consider for a moment why the Great Commission has not simply employed a call to proclaim the Gospel. It surely includes this.

But fundamental to the nature of true discipleship is something that goes deeper than merely hearing the Gospel. It's also about submitting to the will of God.

Hearing and obeying. Hence Jesus' words, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. It's interesting to note that disciple is the only name used for Jesus' followers in the Gospel.

And it should not be surprised that the verb that is most commonly paired with disciple is the verb *akaluthane*, to follow after. Disciples of Jesus are those who follow after him.

To a community in search of its identity, Matthew reminds us that we are firstly and lastly disciples of Jesus. And now in order to fill out what it means to be a disciple of Jesus and what this process of discipleship looks like, we need to look at the rest of the Gospel of Matthew.

[10:28] What is Jesus speaking of when he says, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you? Now Matthew has tried to help us. He's done a very good job of it, I think.

By collecting Jesus' teaching into five sermons. Five teachings. We'll call them sermons. If we look at the structure of the Gospel, it follows a literary pattern.

It follows a literary pattern that alternates between narrative and discourse. Matthew offers us a narrative section that sets the context for the following teaching.

And each sermon ends with something like, when Jesus had finished saying these things. That occurs five times at the end of each of those sermons. This pattern of narrative, sermon, and ending with when Jesus had finished saying these things occurs five times.

And Matthew writes explicitly at the end of the fifth, at the end of the fifth sermon, when Jesus had finished saying all these things. For the first time, that word *all* is included.

[11:41] And I think Matthew is giving us a hint that these sermons contain what he means when he says, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. We're going to look primarily at the, briefly at the five sermons.

By that I don't mean that that's all that's important in the Gospel of Matthew. The narratives are equally as important and there's so much we could take from that.

But to give it a bit of a focus, we'll just be touching on the five sermons. In each case, I think it is important to understand the context of the sermon, which then helps to elucidate the content of the sermon.

And as we go through it, I'll flesh out what I understand to be the context for each sermon. But for the rest of our time, let's look at the sermons themselves.

If you have a Bible, you're welcome to follow, but I'll have most of the scriptures up. The context for the first sermon, the Sermon on the Mount, and indeed for the whole Gospel, is the good news that Jesus Christ, the Messiah, has come.

[13:03] And the kingdom of God has come near. This is the way that it begins. This is the genealogy of Jesus, the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

For any Jew reading this opening, this is an awesome statement. The Gospel of Matthew claims to be speaking about the one on whom every Jewish hope is pinned, the son of David, who will come to restore Israel.

And the son of Abraham through whom all nations will be blessed. In the first few chapters then, Matthew describes the events and the circumstances that lead up to Jesus' ministry.

And as Jesus begins his ministry, Matthew describes it in this way. From that time on, Jesus began to preach, repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.

And thereafter, Jesus calls his first disciples to follow him. And then we read Matthew's summary of Jesus' ministry. Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.

[14:20] Note Matthew's summary description as threefold in the way of preaching, teaching, and healing. He uses the same description in Matthew chapter 9, verse 35.

This is the proclamation and the demonstration of the in-breaking kingdom of God. The kingdom of God has come near. Hence the context of our first sermon.

The king has come and is bringing about a whole new order. And therefore, I think this first sermon, the Sermon on the Mount, gives us a picture of what this new order looks like.

Especially concerned with the character traits, the behavior and the attitudes that it engenders in its disciples. This is discipleship in light of the in-breaking kingdom of God.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. It's a wonderful sermon. There's many things we can speak about.

[15:28] But I'd like to suggest that in the Sermon on the Mount, we see that disciples of Jesus are to be characterized by righteousness. Jesus is clearly very concerned about righteousness in this sermon.

Much of his focus in this first sermon deals with the matter. But not in the way that most of his hearers might have expected. For I tell you, Jesus says, that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Unlike the scribes and the Pharisees who are concerned about the external appearances of righteousness, Jesus describes a righteousness that works from the inside out.

This is why Jesus can say, every tree bears good fruit. Every good tree bears good fruit. But a bad tree bears bad fruit.

A good tree cannot bear bad fruit and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. In the end, we live our lives from the inside out. And so, if righteousness is not characterized by a mere external appearance of righteousness, what is righteousness then?

[16:49] I think Jesus holds up to us that righteousness rather is characterized by right relatedness.

Living in right relationship. And I think we see a vision of this in the prayer that our Lord teaches us to pray. Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

For disciples of Jesus, God is our Father who alone is worthy of our worship. And so, we ask for our wills and our lives to be realigned with His.

give us today our daily bread. Our lives in this world need not be characterized by a selfish hoarding of wealth, but by a simple stewardship of what God gives us.

Restoring our relationship not only with God our Father, but the world that we live in. And forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors.

[18:06] the grace and mercy that God has shown us, we are to show to our neighbor. A righteousness that becomes living in right relationship with our neighbor.

But how do we receive this righteousness? That's the question, isn't it? Darrell Johnson argues that we should not read the Beatitudes as the characteristics that we need to produce righteousness if we want to enter into the kingdom.

These are the kinds of qualities that will be produced in us by the Spirit of God if we let Him. Righteousness is the gift of God to us.

And if that is true, then it makes sense that this righteousness would be cultivated in our lives when we live in dependence on the God who is the giver of this righteousness.

And what does a life of dependence on God look like than turning to our Father in prayer? It's not surprising then that the central to the Sermon on the Mount is the Lord's Prayer.

[19:24] As well as Jesus' encouragement to His disciples, ask and it will be given to you. seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened unto you.

I have a 22 month old daughter named Elsie. And I can think of a few things that bring me as much joy when she comes to me with her arms out and she says, upie data, upie.

And she wants me to pick her up. Or when she's trying to reach for that toy that's just too high and she's trying to get it and she's just, help data, help! I don't know why, but it brings joy.

It's not a burden to help her. It's a joy in my life to help her. If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him.

Disciples of Jesus are characterized by righteousness and righteousness is cultivated in our lives when we live in childlike dependence on God our Father. To me, I cannot see how this happens without cultivating a life of prayer.

[20:50] To be sure, Jesus sees us growing mature and he sees righteousness working its way out into our character, into our attitudes and into our actions.

But we never outgrow our absolute dependence on God. And therefore, we never outgrow our need for prayer. Discipleship, disciples in the kingdom are characterized by righteousness.

righteousness that God gives as a gift to us, which is characterized, which is cultivated in our lives by prayer. That's my first reflection on the Sermon on the Mount.

This brings us to the second sermon in the Gospel of Matthew. In chapter 10, the Sermon on Mission. The context of the second sermon, the context of the second sermon, depict the ongoing in-breaking of the kingdom in the ministry of Jesus with an emphasis on the restoration that it brings.

We begin to see more what the in-breaking kingdom looks like. And so Matthew 8, verse 16 reads, when evening came, when evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him and healed.

[22 : 19] Jesus drove out the spirits with the word and healed all the sick. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah. He took up our infirmities and bore our diseases.

The in-breaking kingdom bringing kingdom restoration. But just in case we're tempted to think that this ministry of restoration belongs to Jesus alone, the disciples who have largely been onlookers up until this point are now nudged into the limelight.

Just prior to the second sermon, we read these words. When he, Jesus, saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd.

Then he said to his disciples, the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest therefore to send out workers into his harvest field.

And as if the prayer has already been answered, the very next paragraph reads, Jesus called his disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness, these twelve, these twelve, Jesus sent out with the following instructions.

[23 : 54] To be a disciple of Jesus is to be one who is sent. the sermon begins, do not go among the Gentiles or to any town of the Samaritans, go rather to the lost sheep of Israel, and as you go, proclaim this message.

The great commission, all authority in heaven and earth has been given to me, therefore go. It's not possible to be a disciple and not to be sent. this means that you and I, as disciples of Jesus, are on mission with him.

For many years I struggled to make sense of this calling in my own life. When I made the conscious decision to follow Jesus as a young teenager, I couldn't conceive of mission in any other way than becoming a minister in the church.

I've made peace for the fact that that is what I think God's called me to be, but I don't think that's just what Jesus means when he says go.

Being a participant in Jesus' mission in the world is something which is more relational than functional. It's not whether you function as a teacher, or a doctor, or a plumber, or a pastor.

[25 : 21] what makes your life missional is that you represent Jesus to the world. Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me.

And anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. I'm afraid you can't escape it. It's who you are as a disciple.

But what a wonderful calling to have. to bring the good news of the kingdom of God that has come near. To be the light of the world that brings hope and truth that sets people free.

To be the salt of the earth that checks decay and brings out the flavor of the world. And more good news, because you represent Jesus, the onus is not on you to make up a spectacular message. the onus is not on you to conjure up mighty deeds, but simply to participate in Jesus' ministry in the world. Jesus is the one who is at work in the world.

[26 : 31] Doing the Father's work through the power of the Holy Spirit. And so Matthew can write that Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority.

authority. And likewise in the Great Commission as we've seen, all authority has been given unto Jesus. He's there for God. This is not to say that there aren't some aspects of our participatory mission with God that are difficult to understand.

There are. To what extent, for example, should we expect the kingdom of God to be manifest in our ministry? as healings?

As driving out demons? Even raising the dead? We have to wrestle with those.

But I think at the heart of the mission, at heart of it, our mission is straightforward. As disciples of Jesus, we are already sent ones. We represent him to the world.

[27 : 39] And we are called to proclaim his message. And to proclaim this message in word and in deed. What this restoration ministry looks like in your neighborhood and in your workplace, I can't find a formula for.

Except to say that this is precisely why we need to live in ongoing dependence on God our Father. In prayer.

ministry, I might say a little more about what it looks like for the kingdom to be breaking in and the tension that exists.

But for now, I want to make one last comment on this sermon, on mission. And that's that mission requires your ultimate allegiance.

patience. We will not be willing to put ourselves on the line for Jesus if we have given our heart to other idols. And a divided heart is not worthy of Jesus.

[28 : 48] Consider Jesus' words in Matthew 10, verse 37 to 38. Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.

And anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. He's obviously not saying do not love your father or your mother or your daughter or your wife.

But he's asking where does your allegiance. lie. This particular aspect of my calling to follow Jesus has become real to me in the past few years as we've lived in Canada.

We've come from South Africa. South Africa is a beautiful country. It's a wonderful place but it's a difficult place to live right now. And having lived in Canada for five years and feeling very at home as my wife and I were considering what God is calling us to, it's as if we were saying, Lord, please call us here.

We want to stay here. And we were doing anything, delaying our decision to go back to the last minute so that we could hear God calling us here.

[30 : 10] Because life here, ministry here has its challenges and life everywhere is not simple but in some ways life here looks like it would have been easier for us.

But what is God calling us to? And we had a strong sense that God is calling us to go back. So God has given us the grace to take up our cross and to follow him.

To be a disciple of Jesus is to be one who is sent, who represents Jesus in the world. And it's a high calling that deserves nothing but our ultimate allegiance.

At this point in the morning you might be thinking that this sounds a little bit idealistic. And if that's the case that would be my fault. It's certainly not what Jesus and Matthew have in mind.

They are well aware of the struggle involved in being a disciple of Jesus in this age. And Jesus addresses some of these struggles in Matthew's third sermon.

[31 : 22] This is a sermon that Dale Johnson calls the Sermon on Mystery. Again, the overarching context of the sermon is the in-breaking kingdom of God.

But the particular context for this sermon includes the seeming ineffectiveness of Jesus' ministry and his preaching. And so in this sermon we see grappling with the way that the kingdom comes. One of the first witnesses to the ministry of Jesus was John the Baptist. And earlier at the beginning of the gospel we see that John holds out great hope that Jesus is the Messiah.

And yet at this point in Matthew's gospel, John the Baptist is imprisoned. And he seems confused about Jesus' identity.

I think it's because John had expected the Messiah to bring restoration to Israel. And in some ways we see this breaking out in the ministry of Jesus.

[32 : 31] But John also expected the Messiah to bring judgment on Israel's enemies. To clean the whole mess up. God. And instead of judgment he hears about Jesus eating with tax collectors and with sinners.

All this while he sits in prison. We can understand his dismay. And so he sends word to Jesus. Are you the one who is to come or should we expect someone else?

In this sermon on mystery, Jesus teaches his disciples that the kingdom does not come in the way that we expected. But hang in there.

In this sermon we find the parable of the sower who sowed seeds, some of which fell on good soil, some on rocky soil and so forth. We find the parable of the wheat growing among the weeds.

The parable of the mustard seed and the yeast. the parable of the hidden treasure and the pearl. I think a helpful place to start is to remind ourselves that the kingdom of God is a hidden but a present reality.

[33 : 53] And disciples of Jesus seek to recognize this hidden reality and realign themselves to it. The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field.

When a man found it, he hid it again and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls.

When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it. The kingdom does not come in the way we expect it.

Jesus says that it often comes in small and in hidden ways, like a tiny mustard seed or yeast which works invisibly in the dough.

Contrast this with our fallen human nature, enamored with power and influence and wealth. If you'd asked me as a young teenager what I wanted to be when I grew up, I would have said the President of the United States.

[35 : 12] I don't think I had a clue what it was that he actually does and I have no idea how I thought a young boy in South Africa could become the President of the United States.

I guess I thought with God all things are possible. But I wanted to be the most powerful man in the world. And I thought this as a Christian.

I thought to myself surely this would be the best way for me to help God change the world. Now the world certainly needs more leaders who follow Jesus.

And if you happen one day to find yourself in the position of the presidency, then go for it. But if you're looking to partner with Jesus in his mission in the world, don't think that the places and positions of prestige are the first places that you should seek out.

The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed or like yeast, coming in small, often in hidden ways. And yet in its obscurity, the advent of the kingdom is immensely powerful.

[36 : 29] even unstoppable. The tiny mustard seed becomes a large plant and the yeast works throughout the dough. At the same time, Jesus is well aware that the presence of evil will be an ongoing experience of our life in this age.

Jesus tells them this parable, the parable of the weeds. The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field.

But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, the weeds also appeared.

The owner's servants came to him and said, Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from? An enemy did this, he replied.

The servants asked him, Do you want us to go and pull them up? No, he answered, because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest.

[37 : 50] At that time I will tell the harvesters, First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned. Then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn. In an agricultural context, the hearers would immediately have been horrified by this story.

Even in present day agricultural economies, one of the worst things that you could do to your enemy is to sow weeds in his field. But when the servants ask to pull up the weeds, the farmer says, No, let them grow together, he says.

And once they have matured at the harvest time, then it will be time to separate the wheat and the weeds. Apparently the specific weed referred to in this parable is called Adanao.

And the root of this particular weed is known to grow deeper and stronger than the root of the wheat. And therefore, once the roots become entwined, pulling up the weeds also means pulling out the wheat.

Furthermore, before the plants have matured, it's apparently near impossible to distinguish between the dandelion and the wheat.

[39 : 09] The farmer needs to wait until the plant is matured and born fruit before he makes a trustworthy judgment.

Likewise, there's perhaps a sense in which evil needs to mature as evil to be judged as such. Imagine if the disciples had been able to call down fire upon Saul of Tarsus when he had been persecuting the church.

We would never have had the ministry of the Apostle Paul. For now it seems that God is willing to allow evil to coexist with good in his kingdom, perhaps because he is merciful and waiting for more to repent.

Whatever his divine purposes may be, until Jesus returns in his glory, we will be living in the best of times and the worst of times. However, we can rest assured that sons and daughters of the kingdom are not ultimately harmed by the sons and daughters of the evil one growing beside him.

There will come a day when the wheat and the weeds will be separated. Then Jesus left the crowd and went into the house and his disciples came to him and said, Explain to us the parable of weeds in the field.

[40 : 38] He answered, The one who sowed the good seed is the son of man. The field is the world and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one and the enemy who sows them is the devil.

The harvest is the end of the age and the harvesters are angels. There will come a day as the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age.

The son of man will send out his angels and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the blazing furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their father, whoever has ears, let them hear. The kingdom of God is a hidden and a present reality.

Disciples of Jesus seek to recognize this reality and realign themselves to it. we probably only have time for one more of the sermons but I'd rather do it in detail than kind of slide over it.

[42 : 01] So we'll do one more and we'll see what the time is at the end of that. The fourth sermon occurs in the context of the in-breaking kingdom disrupting the status quo maintained by the powers that be.

And so the sermon in chapter 11 then deals with what it looks like to be the disciples of Jesus in this disrupted in-between age when the kingdom of God is a hidden but present reality.

In other words, what does it look like to be the church in the already and not yet? In particular, this sermon is concerned with how the church, how the disciples living together are to handle conflict in the community.

This past week, I was fortunate to visit the Westminster Abbey in Mission and to be honest, I was very envious of the simplicity and the beauty of the place.

One monk who I spoke to has lived in that monastic community for 67 years. For 67 years he's been tethered to this place and to this people.

[43 : 18] A friend, I went with a friend and we were speaking to him about the many choices that lie ahead of us in matters of vocation, location, where we would live, the different things, pressures that are bearing on us, having a family and so forth, and his response was caring but straightforward.

That does sound overwhelming. May the Lord be with you, he said. I'm just a simple monk, though. I know where I am today, he said, and I know where I will be in the future, as he pointed through the window to the nearby cemetery where the deceased monks are buried. such a simplicity to his life. I know where I am and I know where I'll be. For 67 years he's lived in that place, in covenant with his brothers, nowhere to run but to stick it out with the Lord and with each other.

Yet I overheard another monk, idyllic as it is, I overheard another monk say that he often gets asked about celibacy, but the hardest thing about monastic life for him is, guess what, community.

[44 : 36] Living together in community with these other godly brothers. If it's a difficult task in a somewhat ideal setting, how much harder in the hustle and bustle of our present day church?

And so, the sermon on what Dale Johnson calls managing conflict, there's more than just managing conflict in the sermon, but he calls it the sermon on managing conflict.

It begins with the introduction. At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, who then is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? He called a little child to him and placed the child among him. and he said, truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. In this sermon, Jesus describes disciples as those who will take the lowly position of a child and says that anyone who welcomes such a child in his name, welcomes him. Furthermore, in the sermon we see that Jesus is fiercely concerned about these little children.

Those who cause them to stumble will be devastatingly dealt with.

[45 : 56] And while the world may have little time for them, he is ever mindful of them. See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my father in heaven.

It seems that while the disciples gathered together that are interested in greatness, Jesus directs their attention to the weak and the marginalized in their midst.

And then as the sermon continues, he turns his attention to how disciples should deal with sinners in the kingdom. If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two brothers, two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.

If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church. And if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector. here we see that one thing that characterizes the community of disciples is that we are to hold each other accountable and yet to do so in a gentle way.

[47 : 32] This is for our own good because our sin needs to be exposed, not hidden. But remember, we are holding our brother or sister to account so that we might win them over, not to belittle them or to soon dismiss them.

Before that, our brother needs to be given every opportunity to hear and to repent. And this cannot be one disciple in a personal vendetta against another, but something that is to be established by the testimony of multiple eyewitnesses and with a process that is to be done in the open.

And then Jesus says a remarkable thing. truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. We two or three are gathered in my name, there I am with them. to be honest, I'm not sure what all of this means. I'm still wrestling with this and working out what it means. But it certainly indicates this, that the fellowship of disciples is immensely important to Jesus.

[48 : 57] And it's something that is immensely powerful. So we should handle it with care. And what should be the key characteristic of the fellowship of disciples in the kingdom?

What should characterize the church as it seeks to dwell in the troubled prison? Authority. Should we be characterized by authority? By power?

By influence? By status? No. Mercy. While the world is concerned about exercising power, God gives his disciples power in order that they may exercise mercy.

Immediately following this promise that we just read, we read the following. Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times, Jesus answered. Up to seven times? He asks. Jesus answered, I tell you, not seven times, but 77 times.

[50 : 05] And now after this Jesus goes on to tell the parable of the unmerciful servant who, although he had been forgiven a great debt, refused to forgive a small debt that was owed to him, and consequently the unmerciful servant is severely dealt with.

No. Disciples of Jesus are to be characterized by mercy, for we have received great mercy. The righteousness that has been given to us, that is working its way out in our lives, has been given to us, a gift of the Father.

The church is to be characterized by mercy, by forgiveness. It's almost as if we can hear John saying, it is by your love for one another, that the world will know that you are Jesus' disciples. I'll close with that, and just as I end, I want to go back to closing just by reading the Sermon on the Mount, just thinking about, as we do, perhaps reflect on something that has stood out.

Jesus says, teaching them to observe everything that I've commanded, and we've taken some time to look at some of that, not all of it, by any means.

[51 : 35] But I close with this, then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them. When they saw him, they worshipped him, some doubted. Jesus came to them and said, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Therefore go, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age. much more to be said. I've shared most of what I know about the Gospel of Matthew, but I believe we open it to a time of questions and discussion.

So, yeah, I do that. And I would welcome, as I wrestle with what discipleship looks like, and especially, I mean, I didn't speak practically about this, but what are some things that it looks like, and how can a pastor help nurture discipleship in the church?

If there's some things that you've thought of, I wish my pastor would help me nurture discipleship in this way, I'd love to hear that.

[52 : 59] I need a lot of help. Okay. Yeah.