

# DISCIPLES WON BY ONE

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## Across The Street – Across The Sea

Text: Romans 5:19

### One Life Matters

Individual lives still count. No matter how much the world moves toward measuring significance in terms of terabytes of storage, and gigawatts of power, and trillions of dollars worth of debt or investment, the fact remains: Individual human lives still matter – one by one they still count. Jesus said, **“Your Father in heaven is not willing that any... should be lost.”**<sup>1</sup> People matter to God and the choices each person makes in this life, matters profoundly too. This is the message of the single verse of Scripture I want to take as our text for today. Hear the words of Romans 5:19: **“For just as through the *disobedience* of the one man [Adam] the many were made sinners, so also through the *obedience* of the one man [Jesus] the many will be made righteous.”**<sup>2</sup>

The disobedience or disfiguring of even one human life can have staggering implications, can't it? One Adam or Eve disobeying God, making a terrible choice in Eden, unleashes a chain reaction of almost unimaginable force. One Adolph Hitler... One Timothy McVeigh... One Osama Bin Laden... one infected carrier... creates shock waves that alter life for millions. We are obsessed with this reality in our time. We easily become fixated on the destructive power of individuals. The priest who molests dozens... the journalist who deceives thousands... the corporate titan who bilks tens of thousands... these are the stories of our time. At moments, it seems like the lever of history is held in the hands of persons like this.

And then a tale like Pat Tillman's makes the front page. We hear the story of a young man who voluntarily laid down millions of dollars as an NFL player, in order to offer his life in the service of his country following September 11. And we know that there is an alternative influence at work in this world. We read of people like Roger Enrico, the CEO who engineered a turnaround of the soft drink giant, Pepsico. Feeling that he had been amply rewarded by bonuses from the company and by tremendous earnings through the years, Enrico requested that his staggering salary be cut to \$1 per year and that the difference be given by Pepsico to fund scholarships for the children of the company's lowest paid employees.<sup>3</sup>

Or maybe you may know the story of Wayne and Anne Gordon, the bright young college graduates who opted out of the fast-track life clearly open to them in order to go to live in the Lawndale neighborhood of Chicago and start a Christian ministry there that has altered the lives of thousands of people. Perhaps you know the story of John Johnson, the young man who often worships here on Sundays. John, who saw his own brother shot to death before his eyes, turned from a life of drugs and street violence and has now helped to redirect the lives of dozens of kids that would otherwise wind up jailed or dead. Some of you have met Maggie Gobran, the Egyptian aristocrat whose

heart was broken by the plight of a beggar woman and who since that time has founded schools and medical clinics that have altered for the better the lives of tens of thousands of the poorest people of Cairo.

### **The Nature of Our Mission**

Yes, it's true; the Apostle Paul was right: **"By the disobedience"** of even one person a terrible amount of heartache and delusion can come into this world. But the second part of Paul's statement is truer still. **"Through the obedience of the one man [Jesus Christ] many are made righteous."** Every time we hear the stories of people who did not have to give up what they had, but freely chose to pour themselves out in order to help others, those of us who know Him, can't help but think of Jesus. We know how Christ obeyed the call of love and laid down his life on the Cross so that anyone who put their trust in Him would be "made righteous" – that is, "put right with God." We know that it is Christ's desire that all people everywhere would be made right with God and with one another. And we know that when Jesus takes hold of an individual's life, makes him or her a disciple (an imitator or apprentice), that person becomes, by God's power and grace, a force for creative change.

They start thinking about how they can help establish new colonies<sup>4</sup> of the kingdom of heaven amidst the wilderness of this world – what they can do to plant churches, hospitals, schools, and mission stations that serve as outposts of healing, help, and hope for all who need it. Individuals touched by Jesus wonder how God could use them to depopulate the Hell bus and load up the heaven train, to help everyone they know cross the bridge to God that is faith in Jesus Christ. They ask God to let their lives become like pipes through which God pours the living water of his Spirit into the parched homes, workplaces, and villages of this world, so those places bring forth new life. They view the Church like a vast global family, made up entirely of adopted children, out in the world just looking for forgotten or bruised kids, ready to welcome them home. Christ's disciples view themselves like a bunch of beggars who've found an endless supply of really good food and are just so happy to be able to point others to where they can get fed.

How do you think of your role in the world? I know one thing, the more we get out and active with our mission, the easier it becomes to find words for it or to want to do it some more. That was certainly the experience of several of our church members who ventured earlier this year to Ethiopia to visit our brother, Benyamen Yusuf, and join the work God is doing there. Catch a glimpse with me of that journey through this window...

### **What God Does When We GO**

[ROLL VIDEOTAPE]

[GO TO THEME SLIDE DURING INTERVIEW]

INTERVIEW: One of the simplest ways I know to describe our mission is that we are called to go into all the world as witnesses of the life-changing love of Jesus. It's been my experience, however, that when we are out there on that mission, the person changed most by Christ's love is often us.

- Can you tell us if and how you found that true during your time in Ethiopia? How did this experience affect you?
- If someone listening today were feeling a stirring but still uncertain about being part of a GO Team in the future, what would you want to say to him or her?

### Still Won By One

Once years ago there was a little girl in an institution who was almost like a wild beast. The workers at the institution had written her off as hopeless. An elderly nurse believed there was hope for the child, however. She felt she could communicate love and hope to this wild little creature. The nurse daily visited the child whom they called Little Annie, but for a long time Little Annie gave no indication she was aware of her presence. The elderly nurse persisted and repeatedly brought some cookies and left them in her room. Soon the doctors in the institution noticed a change. After a period of time, they moved Little Annie upstairs. Finally the day came when this seemingly "hopeless case" was released. Filled with compassion for others because of her institution experience, Little Annie, wanted to help others and so returned to work on the staff of the very institution in which she'd once been incarcerated.

It was Anne Sullivan who, in turn, played the crucial role in the life of a girl named Helen Keller. It was she who saw the great potential in this little blind, deaf and rebellious child. She loved her, disciplined her, played, prayed, pushed, and worked with her until Helen Keller became an inspiration to the entire world. It began with the elderly nurse, then Anne Sullivan, then Helen Keller, and finally every person who has ever been influenced by the example of Helen Keller.

**“Through the *disobedience* of the one man [Adam],”** says St. Paul, **“many were made sinners.”** What started as a garden became wild. Those who should have been children of the light, became blind, deaf, rebellious, and lost. But the Creator of the world was not content to leave things this way. So he came himself to take up life with his children and help them discover their name. **“So also through the *obedience* of the one man [Jesus], many were made right”** with God, themselves, and their brothers and sisters.

That Savior's mission still continues to this day. It remains the single greatest force for creative change on the face of the Earth, as we'll soon be reminded by family members now heading this way from every corner of our globe. The continuing mission of Jesus needs our fervent prayer. He asks us to go forth to be his witnesses across the street or across the sea. Christ's mission calls for the dollars he gave you to invest in that work. Jesus asks every one of us to play a vital part, because it still works the same way it did from the time that Jesus first came – the same way it worked when many of

first felt God's touch, sensed his voice, saw the Light. Disciples get formed one-by-one. And the one He is calling to respond today, is You.

Please pray with me...

Lord God, you are the One who calls, who restores, who supplies, and sends people forth. Lord, we hear your call today...

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 18:14

<sup>2</sup> Romans 5:19

<sup>3</sup> "No, Thanks: CEO's Who Give Up Part Of Their Pay," *Wall Street Journal*.

<sup>4</sup> Thanks to Stanley Hauerwas & Will Willimon's book, *Resident Aliens*, for this characterization.