

DISCIPLE

With Jesus | In Community | On Mission

SERMON TITLE: On Mission

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SCRIPTURE: Selected Scriptures

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The earliest followers of Jesus didn't call themselves Christians. They didn't think of themselves as members of a religion. They considered themselves disciples – students and apprentices of Rabbi Jesus. So if this is who we're supposed to be, how do we begin to define 'disciple'? Is being a disciple about knowing certain things? Doing certain things? Saying, believing, or rejecting certain things? If so, what? Is there a manual for this? How long does it take? And what's the point of it all? Or simply, what does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus?

Mission is a purpose word. It's about *why*. Too many professing Christians live simply trying to not offend God. They try to live in order not to bother him or upset him. And that's a fear-based purpose, and not a freedom-based mission. It's reactive and not proactive. And God is more worthy and awesome than that. So, how do we say that positively? What does it mean to actively be *on mission* as a disciple of Jesus?

What's the better story we should be telling, believing, and living in? Past health, wealth, and materialism; past guilt, shame, and sin; past the existential meaning and happiness we all chase – what's the bigger purpose? Or what about this, What is God's *why*? Have you ever thought about that, his purpose and mission? And what if you have a personal mission that is different than his? How's that going to go for you? If we're going to be faithful disciples of Jesus, we have piece these things together – What does on-mission discipleship look like? To think about these things, let's consider five different biblical pictures that will help us hone our definition of mission.

- Habakkuk 2:14... "The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." Not only will God's glory be pervasive, uppermost, and only as present as sand in the Sahara, but our knowledge of it will be the same. This is the direction and content of the mission.
- John 20:19-21... "And Jesus said, 'Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.'" Mission is a Latin word, but the New Testament was written in Greek. Here, the Greek word for *sending* is what we mean when we use the language of mission. It's the Greek verb *apostello*. It means, sent with a purpose. If you're a Christian, you are a missionary – an apostle, a sent one. Jesus came to reverse the curse of sin and death; that was his mission. And he came to do it by uniquely and sacrificially giving his life for others, and now we get to do the same. "Just the Father sent the son, so the Son sends us." The Father sent the Son on his mission clothed in humility, service, love, and others-centeredness. Now it's our turn.
- Ephesians 3:8-10... "Through *the church* the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known." This is not about random, unrelated Christians. This is about the local church. Small groups of Jesus-followers that ate together, sang together, did Bible together, got frustrated together, cried together, laughed together. God wants to put his wisdom and beauty and glory on display there. God wants to make local churches into hot-spots to show off his grace that makes the glory of Eden happen again. Or to put these first three pictures together: Partnering in God's mission like God's Son happens through God's people, the church.
- Isaiah 42:6-8... "I will give you as a covenant for the people, as a light for the nations." Mission work didn't start in the New Testament. Mission started in the Garden: "Be fruitful and multiply and *fill the earth*." Or when God comes to Abraham, he says, "I will make you a family that will bless all the families of the earth." Or when Israel leaves Egypt and comes to Mount Sinai, God says, "I will make you a holy nation among all the nations so that

you will show them what I'm like." These are the things Isaiah is drawing on in Isaiah 42:6-8. God has always intended his people to be a light to the nations. God's plan is for his people to take the good news of Jesus to unreached peoples and places. This was true of Old Testament Israel, and it's even more true of us today as disciples of Jesus.

- Acts 20:24... "I consider my life of no account unless I finish the race and complete the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace." This is like Paul's personal mission statement over his whole life. These aren't empty words for Paul. These words are married to action. Paul is adamant about this in all of his letters. Yes, in his letters, he calls out sin, he theologically corrects, he pastorally encourages, but he does it all in service of this singular goal of testifying to the gospel of God's grace in Jesus.

So, how do these five pictures of mission relate to each other? We can confidently say that on-mission discipleship means that there's a bigger story than our own that we should be telling, believing, and living in. It's a story about the earth flooded with God's glory – because of Jesus, through the church, and for the nations. And as individual followers of Jesus, just like Paul, we should each be discerning how God is specifically calling us to join his mission. So, here are five brief responses that correspond with the five pictures above. These are suggestions to help us be more and more intentional as it relates to being on mission.

- *Be free because it's about God and not you...* Even if life has you stretched thin, there is freedom when we ponder how all of life should be seen in light of God's glory. Most of us burden ourselves by making our lives about personal comfort or just alleviation of stress. But what if you looked beyond that? What if a large part of freedom and healing and clarity for you was found in consciously giving yourself to a story that's bigger than yours? We grow in grace and peace, the more we care about others growing in grace and peace. If it's about God and his glory and beauty, then it doesn't have to be about us. The pressure's off, and there's freedom there. And it takes great faith and trust to live in this freedom-based mission.
- *Give your life away like Jesus...* If you're free from it being about you, then you can take risks in Jesus' name. If you don't have to live for other peoples' praise, if you're free from manipulating a perfect reputation in other peoples' minds, then with all of that leftover energy, you can be just like your Rabbi by sacrificially loving people. Real love costs something. The last thing the world needs is supposed love that costs nothing; that's just self-indulgence. We all need to see a sacrificial, forgiving kind of love that is out for the good of the other with no strings attached. Love is not self-seeking, "it keeps no record of wrongs." And this is seen when we give ourselves away in humility.
- *Devote yourself to the church...* Remember, God's plan is to put his surprising wisdom and glory on display through local churches. So, put down roots. We're family. Get involved. What do you bring to the table that others don't? Find ways to devote yourself to God's purposes in and through the local church. Being a disciple on mission is never a solo project. It has to be done as a family.
- *Be loud about Jesus...* Not be obnoxious about Jesus, or raise your voice and talk about him, or be more extroverted than you are as a Christian. Follow Paul's example in Acts 20. To everyone near him, there was an overwhelming sense that Jesus is the most important thing to him. Could the same be said of you? That's "being loud about Jesus." If your friends had to write a mission statement for your life, what would it be? If your spouse had to write a statement of purpose on why you do what you do, how would it sound? Would it be a Christ-centered like mission statement like Paul's? Would there be any sense that you want the grace of Jesus to be the loudest thing in your life?

Discussion Starters

- Which of the five pictures made you think the most directly about God's mission?

- In what ways should we be like Jesus as we partner with God on his mission?
- Who is someone you know who has given their life to God's mission through the church?
- Who is someone you know who has given their life to God's mission for the nations?
- What stood out the most to you in this message?
- Which of the five responses do you feel the need to most focus on in your life?