

Discipleship and Mission

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[0 : 00] Today we're going to focus on these two great topics of discipleship and mission. This is the first Sunday of the year and it's a really good opportunity for us to stop and to think about what our priorities are as individual believers and as a church together.

And two of our greatest priorities should always be what we have before us there, discipleship and mission. They're both big topics and today as I suppose is always the case, we'll only just scratch the surface.

And what I want to do is just something very simple. I want us to ask five questions. What are we talking about when we say discipleship and mission? Why do we do it?

Who does it? How do we do it? And now what are the implications of it? What why, who how and now?

We'll just look at each one very, very briefly together today. So when we talk about discipleship and mission, what do we mean? What are we referring to?

[1 : 07] Well the basic meaning of these terms is really very simple and that's something to really emphasize that we don't want or need to over complicate this in any way. A disciple is simply somebody who is a follower of Jesus.

That's what Jesus did. He called people to follow him and they did exactly that. They went after him and they learned from him. And ever since those days, the gospel message has been calling people to become followers of Jesus.

And so when we talk about discipleship, really all we're talking about is our growth and our development as we seek to follow Jesus, as we seek to become more effective disciples who are following our Savior.

And mission simply refers to the fact that as disciples we have a goal and a purpose. And that goal is to fulfill the command that Jesus gave to go and make disciples of all nations.

So when we talk about discipleship, we're just talking about growth and maturity and becoming more and more like our Savior. When we talk about mission, we're talking about being a witness for Jesus, of heralding and sharing the good news.

[2 : 31] And these are two of the great goals of the Christian life. And from the very beginning, when Jesus began to call disciples, these two emphasis are there.

We saw that in the first passage that we read. There's two key phrases in that section of scripture on the screen, Matthew 10, 1 to 5.

One of the key phrases is in verse 1. The other key phrase is in verse 5. It says, Jesus called to him the twelve disciples.

And then in verse 5, it says, these twelve, Jesus sent out. And those two phrases are highlighting our two great themes today.

The fact that we're called to follow Jesus as disciples and the fact that we are sent out by Jesus on a mission. And what I also want us to recognize is that these two areas are inextricably linked.

[3 : 33] Sometimes we focus on one or on the other, so we maybe talk about mission on the one hand, with discipleship on the one hand, mission on the other. We can think of these two things as separate.

But it should never be a case of either or. It should always be a case of both and, because these two areas always feed into each other.

Because the goal of discipleship is to go out on mission. And the goal of mission is to bring in more disciples.

So we can see that with a wee picture there. The writing's a bit small, but I'm sure you can see it. That people start to follow Jesus, and so they are disciples. They grow in their faith.

As they grow, they become equipped to share the gospel. As a result, they can go out with the gospel and engage in mission work. Through that mission work, other people come to faith. [4 : 30] So they become new believers who are then disciples. And so it goes on and on and on and on and on. And these two means are the means by which Jesus has been building his church ever since the days when he called his first disciples.

And it's a great reminder that, as I'm sure you've probably been told before, there are really ultimately only two categories of people.

There are missionaries, and there are those who are a mission field. And so we're all either disciples being prepared to go out with this gospel message, or we are the mission field who desperately needs to hear it.

And that's a really, really important thing to remember. When we talk about mission, we're not talking about going overseas necessarily. Mission means out there in Edinburgh.

Mission means among your family, your friends, in your school with your colleagues. These are the great mission fields of 2019.

[5 : 41] And every week, at the beginning of the week, on a Sunday morning, we come together, and then for the rest of the week, we scatter. And God is placing you all in offices and schools and communities and workplaces and homes where you can be a witness for him.

So as we grow in faith, we want that growth to equip us so that we can stand out in the world and reach out with the good news, so that many, many, many more people will become disciples as well.

The two go hand in hand. So why is it important when we talk about discipleship and mission? Our second question is why?

There's an awful lot that we could say here, but I want us just to focus on two key truths that Matthew 10 and Matthew 11 are setting before us.

And these two key truths are as follows. We want to engage in discipleship and mission because Jesus is Lord, and history has changed forever.

[6 : 48] Very often in the Bible, we can read statements that look pretty simple and seem fairly straightforward, but behind them lie massive truths concerning history and reality.

And we see an example of that in Matthew 11 at the very beginning where we read, when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, are you in the church?

And about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another? John's question seems really simple.

He's basically asking, has the Messiah come? Has God's anointed king come? And that was, of course, a really important question for the Jews because up to this point, the religious lives of the Jewish people was bound up with a hope and expectation that one day God's anointed king, the Messiah, was going to come.

But what we have to recognize is that the coming of the Messiah is not just a turning point for Jews. It's the turning point for the whole universe.

[7 : 57] All of history is centered on this point. Prior to the coming of Jesus, the whole universe is under the illegitimate rule of the kingdom of darkness.

Humanity has failed in its God-appointed duty to rule over God's creation, and instead, sin has wrecked the world and has wrecked humanity.

And the hope that humanity and the universe has is that in the midst of this situation where sin has wrecked the world, God's appointed king, his Messiah, is going to come and establish God's kingdom and put things right.

That's the great goal of the Messiah, to put things right. And the fact that he has come is the turning point of all history.

It's the moment when the world changes forever. On that day, the great restoration work is going to get underway. God is going to restore a broken world, and he's going to raise up a new humanity.

[9 : 07] And John is saying, has that day really come? Has the moment really come? And Jesus gives the most brilliant answer.

He answers him and says, go and tell John what you see and hear. The blind receive their sight and the lame walk. Leopards are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them.

John knew that the Messiah was coming to fix humanity. So when Jesus sends John's disciples back to him with an answer, he says, go and tell John that humanity is being fixed. The work of restoration has begun. Jesus has come to put things right. History has changed forever.

And all of that means that ultimately there's two humanities. There's the old humanity, which is still under the destructive power of sin. And then there's the new humanity, which is being restored through union with Jesus Christ.

[10:15] And that new humanity is made up of disciples of Jesus Christ. And these disciples have got a great mission to bring this good news of restoration to everyone in the old humanity across all the nations of the world.

So that means that when we're talking about discipleship and mission, we're not talking about small things. We're not talking about just something that churches do. We are talking about the outworking of the central turning point of history.

We are talking about the transformation of the world. In Jesus Christ, the age of restoration has been inaugurated, and it's going to culminate when He returns where there will be a new heavens and a new earth.

That means that the whole reason that there are disciples and the whole reason why they're on mission is because 2,000 years ago, history changed forever.

And at the heart of that change is the fact that Jesus is Lord. The decisive change that took place in the coming of the Messiah is the fact that God's kingdom rule has now begun.

[11:30] That's why when Jesus began his message, he said, the time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand. That kingdom is ruled by God's King, Jesus Christ.

And as a result, all citizens who come into that kingdom are under His rule. That's what we mean when we say that Jesus is Lord. And that's part of the reason why He performed the miracles that He did to show that He has authority, authority over nature, authority over illnesses, authority over demons, authority even over death.

He is Lord. And that lordship extends over all aspects of discipleship and mission. We saw that emphasized at the beginning and at the end of our readings.

At the very start, He called His disciples to Him and He gave them authority because He is Lord.

And at the end, we read in Matthew 11, 27, how He says, all things have been handed over to me by my Father.

And that's a very simple point, but it's a really important one. All discipleship and mission is under the lordship of Jesus Christ. It's His kingdom that we call people into.

[12:47] It's His message that we reach out with. He is the leader who the disciples follow. And in every part of our lives, we want to live under His lordship.

Now this is something that we have to protect and something that we have to guard because in 2019, there's a lot of forces competing for lordship over you.

Now that might be a private temptation to sin that nobody else knows about, but yet it's trying to dominate you and trying to have authority over you.

Or it might be the great anti-Christian ideologies that seem to be so prominent in our world today.

Either way, there's a huge amount of pressure to dethrone Jesus from being Lord of our lives and for something else to take his place.

[13:51] We want to make sure that we live under His lordship and our great goal and prayer is that His lordship would be extended into the lives of others as well.

And it's a great reminder that at the heart of discipleship and mission is obedience. And that's a very important thing to remember.

One we can think that when it comes to discipleship and it comes to mission that the most important things are success or fruit or growth or progress or achievement, that we're only pleasing God if everything is booming and going really, really well.

It's not true. The most important thing is obedience because Jesus is Lord and we love Him and we are committed to discipleship and mission because we want to obey Him and live for Him.

So why do we engage in discipleship? We do so because Jesus is Lord and history has changed forever. Another question is who?

[15:14] Who's discipleship and mission for? Who are the people who should be involved? Well when we hear these words discipleship and mission, we can very easily think that these are

categories reserved for the elite.

So there's the ordinary Christians who on the whole are struggling and mucking up in their lives. And then there's the elite and the elite are the ones who are really plugged into discipleship and who are really engaged in mission.

And it's very easy to think that these are the ones that God is really interested in. That discipleship and mission is for the elite.

Is that true? No, for lots of reasons. Jesus tells us that actually the opposite is true.

The complete opposite is true. The brilliant statement there in 11, 25, 26. At that time Jesus declared, I thank you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you've hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children.

[16:29] Yes Father, for such was your gracious will. In other words, the great truths of God's kingdom are not for the elite religious intellectuals, therefore the people whose knowledge and expertise and skill is such that they are like little children.

And little children need to learn a lot. Little children make a lot of mistakes. Little children are vulnerable.

And Jesus says that's exactly the kind of people to whom God wants to reveal the truths of his kingdom.

So if you try to read the Bible with a friend and you get stuck with a question you can't answer or you reach a passage that maybe seems a wee bit unclear or you're really nervous doing it and you feel awkward and you think I am so totally, totally not cut out for this, Jesus says, exactly the kind of person that I can use.

He's not revealed these things to the elite. He's revealed it to little children. It's a great reminder that discipleship and mission are not elitists, therefore everyone in God's kingdom.

[18:09] And it's reinforced for us further by the great words of Matthew 11, 28. Matthew 11, 28 is one of the most famous verses in the Bible and often we can take that verse on its own and we can discover so many amazing truths.

But it's really important to also remember that verse 28 comes after verse 27. So what does Jesus say in verse 27? Well in verse 27 Jesus is talking about the most privileged people on the planet, the most privileged group of people on planet earth.

The people to whom the Son will reveal the Father. All things have been handed over to my Father and no one knows the Father except the Son and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him.

It's impossible to exaggerate the magnitude of that statement that Jesus is saying that there are people to whom God Himself is going to be revealed.

So you think of all the great names of the Old Testament who had a glimpse of God, Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Isaiah, Ezekiel, these are the forerunners of a unique category of people to whom God is going to reveal Himself.

[19:25] And you ask yourself, you think, who, who on earth would fall into that category? And you think it would be the strong, the wise, the holy, the devout, the faithful, the capable.

So if Jesus is going to tell the people who are going to be revealed to them, He's going to tell these people, these super people to come to Him, isn't He?

So He says, come and I'll reveal amazing stuff to you, you super capable, wonderful, astonishing people. Well, in verse 27 He calls them, He says, come to me all who labor and are heavy laden.

And I will give you rest. Now isn't that amazing? Jesus doesn't call the strong or the capable or the wise because they don't really exist anyway. He calls the weary and the burdened.

And it's a wonderful reminder of the fact that Jesus meets us where we are. And I want you to always, always remember that, that Jesus meets us where we are.

[20:42] If anyone here is not yet a Christian or not sure about where they stand before God, you need to remember that, that Jesus meets us where we are.

So you don't need to renovate yourself in order to become a Christian. You don't need to sort yourself out before Jesus will listen to you. You don't need to make yourself attractive so that Jesus will notice you.

You don't need to reach a certain standard. You just need to come to Jesus as you are because He meets us where we are.

And so if you're not yet a Christian, you need to remember that. But as Christians, we also need to remember that. So as we want to engage in discipleship and mission as a congregation, Jesus meets us where we are.

So who are the Christians in here whom Jesus wants to help grow into maturity? Who are the Christians who Jesus wants to use as his witnesses?

[21 : 48] Who are the Christians who are 100% ready to get involved in discipleship and mission? Which ones is it?

All of you. Every one of you. Because discipleship is for everyone. Mission is for everyone. We are all in it together. We all need each other. We all work together. And our weaknesses and our baggage don't matter.

Jesus says that's exactly the kind of people I'm going to work with. Our second last question is how? When we talk about discipleship and mission, how do we do it?

Well again, there's a lot that we could say and I want us to highlight two or three points that Matthew chapter 11 sets before us. First thing that is highlighted for us in Matthew 11 is that discipleship and mission involve responding to Jesus in the right way.

[22 : 55] That makes perfect sense. If Jesus is Lord, then we should respond to him, to his claims and to his commands in the appropriate way. And yet Jesus emphasizes that that's the very opposite of what the people around him were doing.

He says, to what should I compare this generation? It's like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to their playmates. We played the flute for you and you did not dance. We sang a dirge and you did not mourn.

For John came neither eating nor drinking and they say he has a demon. The son of man came eating and drinking and they say, look at him. A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collector and sinner.

Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds. Jesus rebukes the people by comparing them to children who are stubbornly refusing to respond to the opportunities that have been given to them.

So no matter what their friends offer, they disagree. Do you want to be cheerful and dance? No. Do you want to be serious and mourn? No. Whatever the option, the answer is no.

[23 : 55] We would probably use the phrase shifting the goalposts to express the same thing. It's a very kind of childish way to behave. Sometimes you have children and they can maybe, they say that they're really, really hungry.

And so you say, here, here's some food, I don't want to eat it. And you can shift the goalposts and say no, no matter what. Adults do it as well.

We do it in lots of different ways. So we complain that high street shops are shutting down and yet we hate it when the high street is busy.

We hate seeing farmers exploited, but we all go and buy the cheapest milk. We're very good at shifting the goalposts depending on what suits us. And Jesus' point is that people do that towards God.

So they rejected John because he abstained. They rejected Jesus because he didn't abstain. They used any excuse they could to keep shifting the goalposts and reject God.

[24 : 55] And that action demonstrates their lack of wisdom, as Jesus says, wisdom is justified by their deeds. People have been doing that ever since. The world is not submitting to the Lordship of Jesus.

The world is not following him. And the foolishness of that is evident all around us. The key point is that disciples are different.

Disciples are following Jesus, even though the rest of the world is doing everything they can to ignore him or reject him. That's why a key part of being a disciple is being different.

It means being different. And so you need to be ready to stand out in a world that's ignoring Jesus. You need to be ready to stand out in a good way.

So when everybody else at work is being impatient, be patient. When everyone else at work has been harsh, be gentle. When everybody else at work is looking after themselves, be unselfish and considerate.

[25 : 59] Stand out in a good way because we need to be different. As disciples, we need to respond to Jesus in the right way. Which of course raises the question, what is the right way?

That's also highlighted before us in this chapter, that discipleship and mission are grounded in repentance. So discipleship and mission involve responding to Jesus in the right way. They're also grounded in repentance. In verses 20 to 24, Jesus rebukes the cities which witnessed many of his great works. Why was it that he rebuked them?

Well, the answer is in verse 20. Can you see what he says? He began to denounce the city where most of his mighty works has been done because they did not repent.

And the key point is that even though these places had great experiences, they had not done the most important thing. They had not repented. And repentance is the key action required for entry into the kingdom of God.

[26 : 56] You'll remember that Jesus said, the kingdom of heaven is at hand, repent and believe in the gospel. That word, repent, is a brilliant word because it basically means to turn around, to change your thinking and to go in a new direction.

And it makes perfect sense. It makes perfect sense because Jesus has come to inaugurate the kingdom age. God is putting things right and restoring a new humanity out of the wreckage that sin has caused.

Old humanity is on a path to destruction. And so the new humanity needs to turn around and think and live in a new way.

And one of the points been emphasized by Jesus is that the priority for mission and discipleship is not experience. It's repentance. So often we prioritize the value of experience in our spiritual lives. So we think, wouldn't it be amazing to see great days? Wouldn't it be amazing to see what places like Capernaum and Bethsaida saw when Jesus did his mighty works? We think, wouldn't it be amazing to have an experience like that?

[28 : 03] And yet Jesus says that kind of experience is irrelevant in comparison to repentance. In fact, without repentance, these experiences can even count against you.

Because God's great goal is not that we would witness from remarkable events. God's great goal is that we would enter the new humanity. And the way that we do that is to turn away from the old one and to follow Jesus.

Discipleship and mission is grounded in repentance. And we also see that discipleship and mission involve learning.

Jesus says that towards the end of the chapter. He says, take my yoke upon you and learn from me. Now this is a very important point. Learning is an absolutely fundamental aspect of discipleship. That's what the Greek word for disciple means, just basically means to be a learner. And it makes perfect sense. Everything, everything about the Gospel makes perfect sense when we think about it.

[29 : 11] Repentance means to change your thinking. We're no longer following our old way of thinking. Instead we think in a new way. That means we've got a lot to learn. And when I look back about my own experience as a Christian, there's two things that amaze me.

One is that I became a disciple knowing so little. I think back to when I became a Christian, I knew so, so little about anything in terms of the Gospel.

And yet it's a great reminder that we're not saved by knowledge, we're saved by faith. And so I'm amazed at how little I knew when I started. But the second thing that I'm amazed about is that as a disciple, I have learned so much.

And there's still so much that I don't know. But boy, I have discovered so much amazing stuff in the Bible. And life and the universe makes sense when you see it through a biblical worldview.

Learning from Jesus is absolutely thrilling. That's why it's brilliant to be studying something like the New City Catechism together. And answer is a brilliant way to learn.

[30 : 28] And so when we ask the question, what's our only hope in life and death, the answer is superb. That we're not our own, but belong, body and soul, both in life and death, to God and to our Savior, Jesus Christ.

That's teaching us so much. It's teaching us that if we trust in Jesus, we belong to God. We are His possession, so we are utterly safe. We are His treasure, so we are incredibly special.

We're His child, so we are forever loved. There's so many amazing things to learn from Jesus. And in our work of mission, we aim to teach people, Jesus said, to go and make disciples and to teach people.

And that's a really important thing to remember. We're not just shouting at the world, trying to get them to listen. We want to actually teach them the truth.

We want to teach the world the truth. And if you're not a Christian, you've really got to ask yourself that question about truth.

[31 : 32] What is truth about, what is the truth about life and death, about you, about the world? Where are you going to find the answer to that? We're here to say that the answer is in the Bible and in Jesus Christ.

So discipleship and mission involve learning. So last of all, we're going to say now, what's the implications of all this? Well, in 2019, we want to grow as disciples.

We want to reach out and engage in the work of mission. We do that because Jesus is Lord, because history has changed forever. We don't do that as experts or as religious elite, but as little children who are weary and who are completely dependent on Jesus.

And we want to take up his work. We want to serve him. We want to live for him. And in one sense, that involves a lot of hard work. There's lots to do, lots to learn, lots of ways to serve, lots of things that we need to get involved in.

There's a sense in which discipleship and mission involves working very hard. But I want to close by emphasizing that Jesus reminds us of something else that's really important.

[32 : 49] Yes, living the Christian life can involve hard work. But the truth is, following Jesus is actually where we find true rest, where we find true peace, where we find real purpose for our lives.

So I says, take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart. And you will find rest for your souls.

For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. There are so many things in 2019 that are going to try and consume your time and your energy.

All those things will ultimately give you tiredness. So the busyness of work and the pressure of emails and the stress of finances and all of these different things, ultimately all those things will give you tiredness.

But serving Jesus will give you rest. That's why being a disciple is brilliant.

[34 : 09] Let's pray. Dear God, our Father, we pray that in the year ahead in our individual lives, in our families and as a congregation, that we would be engaged in this work of discipleship and mission, that we would grow in faith ourselves, that we would build each other up, but also that we will be able to reach out and welcome new people in so that they too will grow and be discipled and be ready to serve as well.

We pray that in everything we would do it with our eyes fixed on Jesus, our Lord and our Savior. We thank you that He came and that He changed history forever.

We thank you that you have changed all of us as well. We just pray that you would lead us on in your ways so that we would all serve you while we live our lives.

Amen.