

Making Disciples, Lesson 1:

Who Is the Great Commission For?

OPENING UP

1. DO YOU THINK IT IS YOUR JOB TO MAKE DISCIPLES? WHY OR WHY NOT?

2. WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU INTENTIONALLY TRIED TO MAKE A DISCIPLE OUT OF SOMEONE? WHO WAS IT? HOW DID IT GO?

INTRODUCTION

You probably already know how I am going to answer the question that serves as the title of this lesson, but it's important for us to work through God's word together to arrive at the answer. We should begin with the text of the great commission itself.

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "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 observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

- Matthew 28:16-20

The number *eleven* has special significance and tells us exactly who was present for this commission. It is the eleven Jesus called to be apostles (the original twelve minus Judas). Some have

posited that this means the great commission was only meant for the apostles, as an extension of their special work that Jesus called them to do, and it is true that the apostles were called to “make disciples”. It was, in fact, one of their primary works. Their mission was to teach the world what Jesus had commanded (John 14-17, as we have previously seen).

But just because the eleven *apostles* (contrasted with the term *disciples*, which applies to anyone who follows Jesus) were the ones present doesn’t mean that they were the only ones commissioned to do this work. Jesus told the apostles many things that he meant for us as well. Even in the context of Jesus’s final important conversation with the twelve in John 14-17, he told them things that we know must also apply to every Christian. He literally told the apostles that if they loved him, they would keep his commandments (14:15), that he would come back for them (14:3, 18), and that the world would hate them (15:18-20), but we understand that these statements do not just apply to the apostles.

It is vital that we all consider the great commission part of our task in the kingdom. We aren’t all going to carry out this commission the same way, with the same methods (we will talk more about this later), but we all must serve the greater purpose of making disciples. Until you accept this task as part of your own discipleship, you aren’t really a disciple in the way that Jesus intended.

THE EARLY CHURCH

While the great commission was literally spoken to the apostles, it was not just the apostles who were attempting to make disciples in the first century. After Stephen’s sermon and subsequent stoning in Acts 7, here’s what happened:

And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison. Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word.

- Acts 8:1-4

Here we are explicitly told that everyone *except* the apostles “went about preaching the word”. The apostles remained in Jerusalem (still preaching the word, of course) while other Christians were forced to flee. As these “regular disciples” were fleeing, they made sure to try to make more disciples. Of course, they didn’t do the job perfectly. They made mistakes just like we do:

Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch

spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord.

- Acts 11:19-21

Some of them fell into the same sorts of traps and temptations we do in our attempts to bring others to Christ. Rather than being universally inclusive with the gospel, they only tried to convert people who were just like them. This was a main part of Paul's teaching: the universality of the gospel message and the need to include anyone and everyone! Jesus was clear: "go and make disciples of all nations".

We can think about the command to make disciples in terms of both the explicit example of the early church, and the implied need for all churches. The early church clearly did not reserve evangelistic efforts for the select few special people. Even in a time of extreme duress, they made the effort to reach the lost. How often do we have good intentions, but we get too wrapped up in our own problems to see the need that people around us have for the good news? The example of the early church is clear.

But the implication is deeper. If Jesus wants us to make disciples of all nations, and God doesn't want any person to perish (2 Peter 3:9), then we are all going to have to be involved in the work of disciple-making. There are people that you are uniquely situated to reach with the gospel. If God wants all the world to repent, He must know that you are best suited to reach some of the world; that's part of the design of the church!

WHO NEEDS TO BE READY?

Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

- Colossians 4:5-6

Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

- 1 Peter 3:13-17

These instructions were not written for the "professional Christians" (preachers, ministers, and, to an extent, elders), they were given to all. Each person who is lost has a unique story, history, and perception of Christ. The Holy Spirit's efforts to reach them might be best paired with your

individual talents and relationships. I am confident that there are people in your life that you are better able to teach than I. That doesn't mean that we can't involve others in our efforts to make disciples, but it does mean that each of us needs to be intentional and thoughtful about our own abilities and circumstances. You need to "be prepared to make a defense" just like I do. You need to know how "you ought to answer each person" just like the elders do. We all have outsiders in our life that we need wisdom to reach. The great commission is for us all!

A ROYAL, HOLY PRIESTHOOD

Peter emphasized the need for all Christians to be involved in disciple-making in 1 Peter 2. He began by reminding Christians of our need for spiritual growth:

So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

- 1 Peter 2:1-5

What does it mean to "come to him"? This is the language of following, right? Jesus told the one who wanted to be perfect to "come, follow me" (Matthew 19:21). We come to Jesus, as the disciples did, to learn from him. As we grow and become more like Jesus (by drinking the "pure spiritual milk"), we follow him into priesthood, offering sacrifices as he did. We don't literally offer the same sacrifice that Jesus did, but we do give our lives to his service as Jesus did (Romans 12:1-2).

But there is a deeper purpose behind all of this. God has a goal in mind with the whole disciple-teacher business and the building of a spiritual house:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

- 1 Peter 2:9-10

God expects us to proclaim his excellencies! Again, Peter is not talking to a special chosen part of the church; he's talking to *the whole church*. We are *all* priests, we are *all* part of this holy nation, and thus we are *all* supposed to proclaim his excellence! This is not a special task for the chosen few, but a fundamental part of being in the spiritual house of God.

EVANGELISM AS AN EXTENSION OF DISCIPLESHIP

Finally, the need to *make* disciples is an inherent part of *being* a disciple, because of the nature of the one we follow. Remember, to be a disciple is to follow and become like the master. We are all intended to be like Jesus!

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

- Romans 8:29

What does it mean to “be conformed” to his image, if not to have the same mission and purpose as Jesus? And what was Jesus’s mission?

And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” But when he heard it, he said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”

- Matthew 9:10-13

The goal is not to be righteous for its own sake. The goal is to be like Jesus! And one of Jesus’s primary goals was to call sinners, or as he puts it in another place: “to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10). If we do not try to seek and save the lost, if we do not try to bring the lost sheep into the fold, then can we really call ourselves his disciples? Or, to think about it another way:

For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

- 2 Corinthians 5:14-15

If “the love of Christ controls” you, then you will act, not according to what you love, but according to what *Jesus* loves. And we know that Jesus loves people. He consented to being the sacrificial lamb *because* he loves people. All who submit themselves to the master and who strive to become like the master will be motivated by what motivated the master! To love the lost like Jesus does while at the same time saying “evangelism isn’t my job” is lunacy!

For the church to grow, the whole church must be “equipped for the work of the ministry” (Ephesians 4:12). We may have done a poor job of equipping in the past, but we can do better in the future! But it must start with each disciple of Jesus committing themselves to do the work that Jesus did. And that commitment, as we will see in the next lesson, begins with developing the love of Jesus.

DIGGING DEEPER

1. HOW WOULD SOMEONE BE ABLE TO TELL IF YOU WERE CONTROLLED BY THE LOVE OF CHRIST? WHAT ARE SOME OTHER (PERHAPS WRONG) LOVES THAT CONTROL US SOMETIMES, AND HOW DO THOSE LOVES MANIFEST?

2. DO YOU THINK OF YOURSELF AS A PRIEST? WHY OR WHY NOT? WHAT MIGHT CHANGE IN SOMEONE'S LIFE WHEN THEY TRULY CONSIDER THEMSELVES TO BE A PRIEST?

3. HOW READY ARE YOU TO TELL SOMEONE ABOUT YOUR HOPE IN THE GOSPEL? COULD YOU DO IT AT A MOMENTS NOTICE? HOW MUCH TIME WOULD YOU NEED TO PREPARE?

Making Disciples, Lesson 2:

The Heart of Disciple-Making

OPENING UP

1. WHY DO YOU WANT TO MAKE DISCIPLES? HAVE YOU EVER CONSIDERED YOUR MOTIVATION AND REASONS, OR DO YOU JUST TRY BECAUSE YOU KNOW YOU SHOULD OR THINK IT IS EXPECTED OF YOU?

2. WHY DOES JESUS WANT HIS PEOPLE TO MAKE DISCIPLES?

Remember, the goal of discipleship is not attending worship, or praising God well, or serving others. The goal of *discipleship* is to become like the teacher!

A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master.

- Matthew 10:24-25

A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher.

- Luke 6:40

As we have said, this idea *must* inform our understanding of the great commission. The command to make disciples is the command to show people that they should be like Jesus. Thus, our efforts to make disciples must be motivated by the same things that motivated Jesus. We know his mission was “to seek and save the lost”, but why did he do it? In his ministry, what drove him?

MOVED BY COMPASSION

One of my favorite Greek word is *σπλαγχνίζομαι* (*splagchnizomai*). Say it out loud and have fun! In addition to being a fun word to say, it's also an important word in the gospels. It appears several times, but for our purposes the best case is in Matthew 9:

*And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. When he saw the crowds, he had **compassion** for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."*

- Matthew 9:35-38 (emphasis added)

The word is translated "compassion" in most English translations of the Bible, but it has a different literal meaning: *to be moved in the bowels*. Not as in the need to go to the bathroom, but as in having a physical sensation of emotion in response to the suffering of others. When you see someone in pain and your stomach tightens, that is *splagchizomai*, and it is one of the primary emotions that drove Jesus's teaching.

The people around Jesus were "harassed and helpless". They were without a shepherd, because the religious and political elite had abandoned them. Their teachers of the law weren't doing their jobs well (see Matthew 23), and the well-off in Israel looked down upon the common folk (we will talk about this more in a minute). Jesus saw their need for guidance and was moved to compassion. He felt sorrow because of their pain! What did this compassion prompt him to say? He told the disciples to pray that God would send those to teach the lost (Paul also connects "harvest" language to evangelism in Romans 1:11-14).

You could be an answer to this prayer if you have the same attitude toward the lost that Jesus did. Does the suffering of others move you to compassion? Does people's need for a shepherd cause you to feel anything at all? When you see people struggling with their purpose, with feelings of hopelessness, when they are led astray by false teachers, does that emotionally move you? If it doesn't, then you might not be very far along in your discipleship to Jesus.

THE GREATEST COMMAND

Even though compassion is important, it is just a subtype or by-product of a much deeper motivation.

And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, "Which commandment is the most important of all?" Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our

God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

- Mark 12:28-31

Why are these the greatest commandments? Because all other commands flow from and are fulfilled by these first two. We fulfill the command to worship God because we love him. We fulfill the command to obey God because we love him. And we fulfill the command to make disciples, yes, because we love God and love other people!

There are other good motivations for evangelism (and many other bad ones), but this must be the first. Why are we commanded to love our neighbor as ourselves? Why aren't we commanded to first love ourselves (seriously, we are never, not once, commanded to love ourselves). We *instinctively* want good for ourselves (though sometimes we have bad ideas about what that good is), so we should *want* good for others! We need to learn to put the needs of others on the same level we instinctively put our own needs. And what is the best good that people can have? What is it that they need the most?

Any attempt to make disciples that is not motivated by love for God and love for people will inevitably develop some fatal flaw that will cause failure. Cultivating a love for other people is a vital part of discipleship because it is the central part of who Jesus was and is.

PARABLES OF LOST THINGS

But even evangelism that is motivated by love might be incomplete, because it is easy for our love to be incomplete. In Luke 15, Jesus told three parables that highlight a critical part of God's love. Let's read the first of these:

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.” So he told them this parable: “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’ Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

- Luke 15:1-7

What prompted the parable? The Pharisees and scribes (those who supposedly knew the law of God the best) were grumbling about who Jesus was hanging out with. Have you ever known anyone who grumbled about your choice of associations? Maybe you are the grumbler about others!

This grumbling prompted Jesus to tell a parable with a simple message: God loves everyone and wants all to be saved! It is very easy for us to only try to make disciples of people we like or people who are easy to talk to. We might even fall into the same trap as the Pharisees and think that we should ignore certain kinds of people. When we do this, we are not loving like the master loves, and we won't seek to make disciples as the master did.

This parable, and the following two in Luke 15, all have the same message, and all end with joy. The one who found his sheep rejoiced, and Jesus said that there is joy in heaven when sinners repent. The woman who found her coin rejoiced so much she let all her neighbors know about it. The father of the prodigal son was so joyful to have his son back that he threw a feast!

How joyful are you when people repent? How joyful are you when you see others trying to reach the lost? How joyful are you when you get an opportunity to seek the lost? These questions require deep introspection. If any opportunity to reach the lost does not lead us to joy (maybe because it is an opportunity to reach someone we would rather ignore) then we are not true disciples of Christ.

LOVE OVER ALL

We are going to read a long section of scripture from 1 John. As we do, think about how this text might apply to the command to “make disciples”.

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has

not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

- 1 John 4:7-21

What did the love of God motivate him to do? “God sent his only son into the world”. This was a mission of sacrifice, pain, and heartache. But it was motivated by love, and both the Father and the Son knew it was worth it. Do we know that our evangelism, even when it’s difficult, uncomfortable, and painful, is worth it? Do you *feel* the worth of the effort?

When we “abide in love” we will love who God loves and act like God acts. He was motivated to do something about the lostness of humanity! Are we motivated to do the same?

1 John 4:18-19 might be my favorite verses in the whole Bible: “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. We love because he first loved us.” When we love people like God does, it will help us overcome some of the most insidious obstacles to evangelism: fear and partiality. God’s love shows us how to overcome these obstacles, and our love for people, as it grows, should help us overcome our fear of rejection, awkwardness, or persecution. Our love overcomes our tendency to partiality, because we know that God loves all people, even those rejected by our friends or by society (we will talk more about things that prevents us from making disciples in a later lesson).

But knowing this in our heads doesn’t automatically make it easy. Now that we have delved into the heart of disciple-making, lets next consider some of the bad ways we often think about evangelism.

DIGGING DEEPER

1. WHAT HAPPENS WHEN OUR EVANGELISM IS NOT MOTIVATED BY LOVE? WHAT ARE SOME OTHER THINGS THAT MIGHT MOTIVATE US TO EVANGELIZE, AND WHY MIGHT THOSE MOTIVATIONS CAUSE FAILURE?

2. HAVE YOU EVER LOOKED DOWN ON SOMEONE WHO DIDN'T KNOW CHRIST, EITHER BECAUSE OF THEIR APPEARANCE, BEHAVIOR, WAY OF SPEAKING, OR CULTURE? HOW DO YOU THINK JESUS LOOKED AT THAT PERSON?

3. DO YOU FEEL LOVE IN YOUR HEART TOWARD THE LOST? IF NOT, WHAT ARE SOME THINGS YOU COULD DO TO DEVELOP THAT LOVE?

Making Disciples, Lesson 3:

Bad Ways to think about Evangelism

OPENING UP

1. WHAT ARE SOME ANALOGIES THAT YOU HAVE HEARD PEOPLE USE TO DISCUSS EVANGELISM? WHAT ARE SOME THINGS OR PROCESSES THAT EVANGELISM HAS BEEN COMPARED TO?

2. WHAT IS THE SINGLE BIGGEST THING (COULD BE AN ATTITUDE, FEELING, OR CIRCUMSTANCE) THAT HOLDS YOU BACK FROM MAKING DISCIPLES?

INTRODUCTION

My first goal with this class is to reshape the way we think about evangelism: our motivations, mindsets, and attitudes. Remember, the Devil's best tool is deception:

But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

- 2 Corinthians 11:3

Paul was worried that the Corinthians might be deceived into accepting a different form or version of the Gospel of Christ, but in our context the Devil still would love to deceive us. He would love us to have muddled, unclear thinking about how to seek the lost, or to be motivated by the wrong things. So, let's briefly consider some bad (varying from mistaken to sinful) ways that we sometimes might think about evangelism.

GUILT-BASED EVANGELISM

This might be the most common way we think poorly about evangelism, and this way of thinking is not limited to disciple-making. It is easy to fall into the trap of basing our entire Christian lives around guilt. Do you drag yourself out of bed on Sunday mornings because you know you will feel guilty if you don't attend worship? Do you hurriedly say a pray right before you fall asleep because you feel guilty you didn't pray that day? When you see someone in need is your primary response one of resigned obligation? These are signs that you are driven primarily by guilt. While guilt is a good motivator under the right circumstances, it shouldn't be our primary drive.

It's easy for us to fall into this trap with evangelism. One day it hits us that we haven't really made any evangelistic effort in a while, so we grab a flyer from the lobby or share a Facebook post so we can stop feeling guilty. Or maybe we even muster up the courage to invite that one coworker to church. We do it, get it over with, and then we can assuage our guilt for a couple weeks or months until it gets overwhelming again. But this is not a sustainable way to live.

In essence, we are doing resistance training against our guilt. Just like lifting weights helps us literally carry more, this guilt-cycle of spirituality only helps us live with guilt longer and lengthen the gaps between periods of action. And before we know it, we no longer feel guilt for not evangelizing, and so we don't do it anymore because that was our primary motivator. Perhaps this motivated the Hebrews writer warns his readers to "take care":

Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

- Hebrews 3:12-13

One way we can be tricked by "the deceitfulness of sin" is to think that if I can just stop sinning, I will be good enough. But we know that we can't be, so guilt will always be present. When we live based on guilt, we just train ourselves to resist guilt. We are *hardening* our hearts! (Again, to note: this doesn't just apply to evangelism. It can just as easily apply to prayer, Bible study, worship, or service.) While guilt does motivate all Christians in some ways, we must move beyond this to deeper, broader, more meaningful motivations:

The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

- 1 Timothy 1:5

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

- Ephesians 2:8-10

The antidote to guilt-based living is love and grace! While we know that we won't ever be perfect, and guilt does spur us to repentance, we also must internalize the grace given to us by God that allows us to live beyond guilt. Accepting that God loves us even though we aren't perfect empowers us to do good out of love for God and gratitude for that grace. When we live based on the love that comes from the grace God has given to us, our evangelism will not be sporadic, because we continually acknowledge that our efforts to make disciples are really just efforts to share the grace of God that we constantly enjoy!

EVENT > PROCESS > PEOPLE

The further we stray from being motivated by love for the lost and love for God, the more we warp what we think evangelism should be. It is tempting to think of disciple-making as a one-time *event*. It's passing out a flyer or sharing a post or inviting someone to worship. Of course those things can be good and absolutely should be part of our efforts. You *should* be inviting everyone you know to worship as *part* of your disciple-making. But these things are not themselves what evangelism is all about. And they certainly shouldn't be the bulk of our efforts to make disciples.

Evangelism is not an *event*, it's a *process*, something that takes time and investment in people's lives. Jesus himself demonstrated the balance of both the *event* and the *process*:

As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he rose and followed him. And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" But when he heard it, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

- Matthew 9:9-13

Jesus did a lot of what we might consider *event* evangelism. The public teaching and the preaching was open to all, it was an event for each town he passed through. But we can take this too far. The event mindset misses the lesson of Jesus and makes us think, "If I can find the right words to say to a person, then I am done with my evangelism". But Jesus did more than that. He spent time with the lost. He invested in them beyond the public event teaching. This process is what turned someone from being merely interested in what Jesus had to say, to being a disciple of Jesus. While many conversions *start* with the event (the invite or the flyer), we must be willing to continue the *process* by investing in that person.

But, we can also go too far into the idea of the *process*. It is tempting to reduce evangelism to something akin to a magic spell. If I say the right things, then I do the right things, and I spent the

right amount of time in the right kind of way, then I can convince someone to become a Christian. But that's not how people work! That was exactly the mindset that Jesus was combating by quoting Hosea 6:6: "I desire mercy, and not sacrifice".

The people of Hosea's day thought that if they could follow the formula of worship (the sacrifice) they didn't need to have the right heart (mercy, or steadfast love). They had reduced their worship to the basic forms without investing in their relationship with God. Centuries later, the Pharisees of Jesus's day did the same thing with the "tax collectors and sinners". They were so concerned with the *process* of righteousness (not sinning and remaining pure) that they forgot about the heart of righteousness: the people they were supposed to guide! The Pharisees weren't just supposed to be pure; they were supposed to help others be pure. That inherently meant they were going to have to spend time with the impure! That's why Jesus looked at the crowds with compassion and said they were "sheep without a shepherd" (Matthew 9:36).

Remember our previous lesson: Jesus was motivated by love for the lost! When we make evangelism too formulaic, it's easy to lose that motivation. It's not about finding the right words in the right order or tricking people into become Christians through sheer force of logic or charisma. It's about helping people discover the joy, love, and grace of Christ, and see their need for his forgiveness. We can't put any specific *process* over the people God loves.

SELF-CENTERED EVANGELISM

Many of our excuses for not trying to make disciples boil down to our own perceived inadequacies. "I don't know what to say" or "I can't handle conflict" or "I'm not brave enough". Paradoxically, these attitudes are arrogant in the utmost because they focus evangelism all on us. These are the attitudes of people who think evangelism is all about them and how good (or not good) they are.

When we focus so much on ourselves, our abilities, and our knowledge, of course we won't want to evangelize, because we *aren't* good enough. But that's the point of our message! The gospel is based on the idea that *people aren't good enough*. We all need the love and forgiveness of God! That's why Jesus ended the great commission this way:

*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 observe all that I have commanded you. **And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.***

- Matthew 28:19-20 (*emphasis added*)

Evangelism is not about how smart or good or charismatic *you* are, it's about the one whose message we proclaim! When we think that if we can just find the right combination of words or come up with the right kind of event or portray the church is just the right light, we abandon the

true power of the message! Paul himself, who we would consider to be possibly the greatest evangelist who ever lived, did not want his work to be about himself:

And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

- 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

Our evangelism must be continually, relentlessly focused on our Savior and our God. We are not the ones who save people, he is. We aren't trying to get people to be like us, we are trying to get people to be like *him*. Jesus is the one who builds the church:

And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

- Matthew 16:17-18

Just like the apostles did, we do have a part to play in the work of church-building, but we are not the true builders. We are simply tools in the hands of the master craftsman, the true builder:

For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses—as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. (For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.)

- Hebrews 3:3-4

Our job is not to convince people, our job is to show people Christ and show them the way to him. He does the convincing! He provides the growth:

What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.

- 1 Corinthians 3:5-9

God does use us in his work, certainly. The Corinthians believed “through” Paul and Apollos because God used them as instruments of his power. But people can only become disciples of Jesus by seeing the power and love of Jesus. Convincing people to join our congregation is not the same

thing as convincing them to become a disciple of Jesus (though if our congregation is full of Jesus's disciples, new disciples will want to join our congregation naturally).

The self-centered evangelist says:

- I won't know what to say, so I just won't say anything at all. What if I say the wrong thing?
- What if they reject me? It will hurt so much.
- I will invite this person to church because that's easier than trying to invest more.
- If I can just find the right way to say it, they won't be able to help being convinced.
- I'm not good enough to evangelize. My failings will drive people away.

The Christ-centered evangelist says:

- Thank God for all this Scripture I can use. I'm glad I don't have to come up with it myself.
- What if they reject Jesus? That would hurt so much.
- I will invite this person to church as a first step because our congregation exhibits the love of Jesus.
- Even if I say all the right things, I know that many people still won't be convinced.
- I'm not good enough, but God can use my forgiven sin to show his power!

Remember, it's not about us, it's about the one we serve.

DIGGING DEEPER

1. ARE YOU A GUILT-DRIVEN PERSON? ARE MOST OF YOUR GOOD WORKS MOTIVATED BY GUILT? HAS THAT LED YOU TO FEELING JOYFUL IN YOUR CHRISTIAN SERVICE?

2. DO YOU EVER HOLD BACK FROM EVANGELIZING BECAUSE YOU KNOW THAT IF YOU START, IT MIGHT LEAD TO A LONGER PROCESS OF TRYING TO REACH THAT PERSON?

3. WHEN YOU REFUSE TO EVANGELIZE BECAUSE OF YOUR INSECURITIES, WHAT DOES THAT SAY ABOUT YOUR TRUST IN GOD?

Making Disciples, Lesson 4

Lessons from Salt and Light

OPENING UP

1. HOW OFTEN ARE YOU AROUND THE LOST? IF THE ANSWER IS “NOT VERY OFTEN”, WHAT CAN YOU DO TO CHANGE THAT? IF THE ANSWER IS “ALL THE TIME”, WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THAT TREMENDOUS OPPORTUNITY?

2. DO YOU THINK IT IS OBVIOUS TO THE PEOPLE AROUND YOU THAT YOU ARE A CHRISTIAN? HOW WOULD THEY KNOW?

INTRODUCTION

Now that we have examined our motivations and frameworks for disciple-making (both good and bad), let us transition into how Jesus and his apostles talked about evangelism. We will start with what is probably the most well-known passage on the subject:

You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

- Matthew 5:13-16

Jesus was a master of analogy and simile; using figurative language to help his hearers understand the spiritual truth of his message. In Matthew 5, Jesus was talking to a large crowd about various matters of the heavenly kingdom, and what would be expected of people who wanted to be in it. He had just given them the list of beatitudes, and would after this discuss emotions and actions. The key verse in the whole sermon is Matthew 5:20:

For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

- Matthew 5:20

This sermon is all about how to fulfill God's righteousness. Now that we understand that, what should we learn from the analogies of salt and light?

SALT

There have been many things written about the things that salt does: it preserves, it causes thirst, it flavors. But in his analogy, and in other places in the gospel, Jesus specifically talked about the taste of salt. The metaphor immediately raises several questions.

First, if we are the salt, who is doing the tasting? When Jesus said we are the salt of "the earth" and the light of "the world", he was talking about how we are always around other people. He was more explicit when he talked about light, saying that our deeds should shine "before others".

What flavor are we adding? Jesus's sermon in Matthew 5-7 is full of instruction about how to live and think righteously. He talks about emotions, mindsets, and how to treat other people. The way we live and what we say should add the flavor of God's righteousness to people's lives. People who are around us should experience God's righteousness through us, by how we treat them and the things we say to them. They should see what it means to be righteous, and they should see the benefits of a righteous mindset. Anyone who spends any significant amount of time around a disciple of Jesus should develop a pretty good idea of what it means to be righteous, even if they themselves don't want to act righteously.

While Jesus is very general about *how* we flavor people's lives, Paul was more specific in a passage we have looked at previously:

Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

- Colossians 4:5-6

Whereas Jesus used general language ("the world", "the earth", "others") Paul uses the analogy of salt to explain how we should affect those outside the kingdom of God. Specifically, Paul knew that way we *talk* to others should be "seasoned with salt". This means that we will be thoughtful about

how our words affect those around us, especially when it comes to answering questions or discussing the reasons why we do what we do.

If we are living the kind of life described by Jesus in Matthew 5-7, the life of God's righteousness, it should lead to questions from those around us. The life Jesus describes is contrary to the natural way of being, so as we interact with others there should be opportunities to talk to others about why we do what we do. This is where Paul's instructions come in, as we strive to be "gracious" (seeking the good of the other person and not being harsh) and "seasoned with salt" (always pointing people back to God's standard).

This is such an important point that the gospels record this idea multiple times. Jesus went on to warn about salt that doesn't fulfill its function; it's only good to be thrown out. Luke records something similar:

"Salt is good, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is of no use either for the soil or for the manure pile. It is thrown away. He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

- Luke 14:34-35

Salt that isn't salty isn't even good enough "for the manure pile". The Christian who does not add God's righteousness to the lives of others, in both teaching and in action, is not doing what they are meant to do!

LIGHT

Returning to the text in Matthew 5, we now come to the analogy of light. As with salt, Jesus used the light analogy to teach about the purpose of those who would follow him. In the way that salt that is not salty is no good, neither is a lamp that is hidden under a basket. Light must illuminate other objects, else why even have the lamp?

Light language and light imagery are much more common in the New Testament, used by Jesus and his apostles fairly frequently. Paul makes the same point about light in 2 Corinthians:

Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light

shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

- 2 Corinthians 4:1-6

Where Jesus used “basket”, Paul used “veil”. The idea of a veil is a reference to Exodus 34, when Moses came down off the mountain from the presence of the Lord. His face shone so brightly that the people couldn’t bear to look at him. It wasn’t Moses’s glory that burned their eyes, but the glory of the Lord that had rubbed off on him. This is exactly the kind of thing that Jesus was talking about in Matthew 5. The light that we shine, it isn’t ours. We shine the light of our “father who is in heaven”. The brightness of our lives should reflect the brightness of our savior! Paul called it “the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ”.

But Paul warned us that “the god of this world” can bind the unbelievers. He puts a veil over them so that they cannot see the “light of the knowledge of the glory of God”. Our job as disciple-makers is to remove as many of these barriers to vision as possible, and to especially make sure that we aren’t the ones putting up the barriers (or as Jesus said, putting the lamp under a basket).

Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.

- Philippians 2:14-16

In this text, the way we prevent our light from shining is our attitudes. When we constantly grumble and complain, it prevents people from seeing the light of Jesus in our lives. This is especially true when we complain about the church or complain about our fellow Christians. When people perceive that your faith and your way of faithful living is a burden to you, why would they want to join you? That puts a basket over your light!

Therefore do not become partners with them; for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, “Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.

- Ephesians 5:7-16

Jesus said that our “good works” were part of the way we shine. In this text Paul tells us not to “become partners” with those in the world, meaning what? We aren’t supposed to do the things they do and live like they do! What does he mean when he says we should “expose” the “unfruitful works of darkness”? Does this mean that we need to go around making sure everyone knows all the bad things other people are doing?

I don’t think so. Remember, the light that we shine is the righteousness of our father. What we expose is not necessarily the works themselves, but the unfruitful nature of them! By the way we live it should become apparent that the way of the world is fruitless, not resulting in the joy or meaning that people need.

But if we live like the world does, then we too will have that fruitlessness. People will not see the “fruit of light” if we only live like everyone else (prioritize the same things, do the same things, worry about the same things). Our similarity to the world becomes another barrier for them to see the light of the gospel! For our light to effectively shine before others, our lives must be sufficiently different from worldly living.

PUTTING IT TOGETHER

You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

- Matthew 5:13-16

In either case (light and salt), there is an implied necessity. Salt is no good if it just sits in the container with other salt; it must be in contact with something else to do its job. Similarly, light serves no purpose if it just illuminates the inside of a basket; it must contact all the other things in the house for it to do anything meaningful.

If we are salt and light, what does that mean for us?

First, the Christian who has no contact with the saltless or the lightless cannot fulfill their purpose as salt and light. We must be around the lost to make an impact! This is why Jesus said to “go into all the world” as part of the great commission. We can’t expect to accomplish the job when we just stick around other disciples all the time.

Second, Paul used the same phrase in connection with both analogies: “making the best use of the time” (Colossians 4:5 and Ephesians 5:16). We all have limited time, both in the absolute sense of how long we will live and in the more narrow sense of each day. You only have a limited time around each lost person to effect change. Of course, you are around some people more than others. But

more than just the amount of time spent together, even among all the times we are around those outside the kingdom there might be extremely limited windows of opportunity when the other person is receptive and open to the message. So, a large part of fulfilling the great commission in our lives is learning how to maximize our ability to influence others in the short time that we have.

Being salt and light is not something we can turn on and off. It's something we must *be* all the time, precisely because our time is short. Only by "being ready" (1 Peter 3:15) all the time can we take advantage of the opportunities we have.

In their book ***Contagious Christianity***, Hybels and Mittelberg distill these lessons from salt and light into a formula:

HIGH POTENCY + CLOSE PROXIMITY + CLEAR COMMUNICATION = MAXIMUM IMPACT

To be salt and light and Jesus wants, we must live the way he did, be around the lost as he was, and teach the things he taught. Only by doing these things can we truly change people's lives.

DIGGING DEEPER

1. DO YOU THINK PEOPLE ARE GLAD WHEN YOU ARE AROUND? HOW DO YOU THINK YOU AFFECT PEOPLE'S LIVES WHEN YOU ARE AROUND THEM?

2. ARE THERE ANY THINGS IN YOUR LIFE THAT MIGHT BE PREVENTING PEOPLE FROM SEEING YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER'S LIGHT? WHAT ARE YOU DOING THAT MIGHT STOP PEOPLE FROM SEEING JESUS IN YOU?

3. HOW READY ARE YOU TO BE A BLESSING TO OTHERS WHEN THE OPPORTUNITY ARISES?

Making Disciples, Lesson 5
A Formula for Making Disciples