

# Disciple: What It Means to Follow Jesus

Sent \* 2 Corinthians 5:14-21

Ok, take your Bibles and turn with me to two passages this morning. We will start in John 20, but most of our time will be spent in 2 Corinthians 5. So, find 2 Corinthians 5, mark it for easy access later, and then find your way to John 20.

Now, I hope you are ready to go this morning, because we have a lot of work to do. We are coming down the homestretch in our Disciple series, and today might just be the most important message of all. In fact, if you get what we talk about today, everything else just might come together for you.

With that said, let's do a quick review of what we have learned so far about being a disciple. Here is our definition once again:

*A disciple is someone who **worships** Christ in all of life, lives in **community** with other disciples, and lives on **mission** to make more disciples.*

Last week we focused on the community part and the fact that we are called to worship Christ together. In other words, being a disciple is not something we do in isolation. God does not intend for us to be Lone Ranger Christians. This means that when we make a commitment to follow Christ, at the same time we make a commitment to everyone else who is following Him.

Now, there was a key phrase that I introduced last week that I would love to become a rallying cry for our church. Do you remember it? When we describe who we are as a church we can say *we are a worshipping community on mission*. Now, I don't know if this has grabbed hold yet, but I hope it will in the days ahead. *We are a worshipping community on mission*. The last 3 weeks we have talked about the worshipping part and the community part. And this week and next we are going to talk about the mission part.

That being the case, I'd like to give you an outline for the next two weeks. There are four absolutely critical things about mission that I want to hit in these two messages.

- #1 All disciples have been sent on a mission.
- #2 The mission is local and global.
- #3 The mission is evangelism and edification.
- #4 The mission is Word and deed.

Today we are going to tackle number 1, with the other 3 coming next week.

## **All Disciples Have Been Sent On A Mission**

So, let's talk about the fact that all disciples have been sent on a mission. Of course, we have already talked at length about what the mission is. What is our mission? Our mission is to make disciples. So, we've got that, right? Therefore, my focus this morning is not on the making disciples part but rather on the fact that to be a disciple means to accept and engage in this mission. Let me use an illustration from the Mission Impossible movies to bring this home. At the beginning of each of these movies, Ethan Hunt is given the opportunity to accept or reject a mission that is given to him by the secretary of the IMF. You know the famous words, right? Your mission, if you choose to accept it...Well, what I am trying to say is that when Jesus comes to us and says follow me, and we respond yes, it means that we are choosing to accept his mission. There is no saying yes, I will follow you, but I won't go on the mission. To follow Jesus means to go on the mission. Do you remember what Jesus said to Peter and Andrew in Matthew 4? He said, "Follow me and...." And what? "And I will make you fishers of men." To follow Jesus means to follow him on mission.

Charles Spurgeon, one of the most famous preachers of the past 200 years, put it a little more plainly than I am. He once said, *"Every Christian is either a missionary or an imposter."*

Now, that statement is a challenging one. It is a convicting one. And it might even be a guilt-inducing one. But you know what? I don't want to guilt you into anything today. I don't want you to leave here feeling bad about the fact that you haven't been engaged in mission. What I do want is for the Holy Spirit to teach you about the fact that you have been sent on mission and to motivate you to respond in obedience, not because you have to, but because you want to. Not because you fear what will happen if you don't, but because you are excited about what will happen if you do. So, I really have one objective today. I want you to understand and respond to the fact that Jesus has sent you on a mission.

## **God is a Sender**

Now, if this is going to happen we first have to understand that God is a Sender. And I know this is probably a new thought for many of us, so please listen carefully. Most of us think of God in many different ways. We think of him as Lord, King, Master, Creator, Redeemer, and Savior, among others. And rightfully so, as he is all of these. But for some reason we have missed that God is also a Sender, which is unfortunate, because it is all over Scripture. In fact, we can actually say that one of the primary ways we see

God in Scripture is as a Sender. And since we don't have time to look at all the examples, let's just focus upon the ones that relate directly to us.

### **1. The Father sent the Son. (John 3:16-17)**

First, in John 3:16-17 we see the Father sending the Son:

*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. [17] For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.  
(John 3:16-17 ESV)*

So, the Father sent the Son on a mission to save the world.

### **2. The Father and the Son sent the Holy Spirit. (John 15:26)**

Second, in John 15 we see the Father and the Son promising to send the Holy Spirit.

*But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. (John 15:26 ESV)*

So, Jesus promises his disciples that he and the Father will send the Holy Spirit to help them accomplish their mission. And last week in Acts 2 we saw how that came to fruition in a powerful way.

### **3. The Son sends his disciples. (John 20:21)**

Finally, in John 20, we see Jesus sending his disciples on their mission. Look at verse 19:

*On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." [20] When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. [21] Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." (John 20:19-21 ESV)*

This passage is John's version of the Great Commission. You may remember last week I told you the Great Commission is given 5 times, once in each gospel and also in Acts 1. Each of them is stated distinctively due to different audiences and different contexts in which they are given. Here in this passage John wants his readers to understand that to be a disciple means to be sent by Jesus.

Now, let me point out two things about sending here. One is that the word mission means sending. So we can say that the mission of God is to send his Son, his Spirit and his disciples to save the world.

Second, we should understand that our mission is to join God on his mission. So, God's mission is to send for the purpose of saving the world, and our mission is to respond and join him on his mission.

Ed Stetzer explains it this way:

*Here is the inescapable truth: If we want to follow God's will – if we want to fall in line with the story of biblical history, if we truly want to be followers of Jesus in the world – then we need to understand God's sending – and respond to it. Mission isn't the going. Mission isn't the getting. Mission is understanding the intention of God and then acting on it. – Ed Stetzer<sup>1</sup>*

The reason that this understanding is imperative is that for too long we have thought that the only people who are sent out are missionaries. People who leave here and go over there – wherever there may be. For example, if I were to ask you today who the missionaries are in the room, most of us would probably respond 'the Zellmers.' The problem is that being a missionary is not about going to another location but rather about being sent by God. And who has been sent? Every single one of us has been sent. We are all missionaries. Look at verse 21 again:

*As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.*

Do you know who the "you" is there? The "you" is you! Listen Harmony. If you are a disciple you have been sent by Jesus.

And so here is the big challenge of the day. It's to respond to God's sending the way that the prophet Isaiah did. Isaiah 6:8 records this conversation between the Lord and the prophet:

*And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here I am! Send me." (Isaiah 6:8 ESV)*

---

<sup>1</sup> Stetzer, Ed. 2008. Pg. 14. *Sent: Living the Missional Nature of the Church*. LifeWay Christian Resources.

Now, I'd like to drill down with you a little more on the details of God's mission, and to do that, there is no better place than 2 Corinthians 5. So, let's get there now. Pick up with me in verse 14:

*For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; [15] 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. [16] From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. [17] Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. [18] All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; [19] that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. [20] Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. [21] For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*  
(2 Corinthians 5:14-21 ESV)

This is such a wonderfully rich passage. There is so much here for us. That being the case, let's try to get as much out of it as we possibly can. This morning I want to look at four things in this text. I want to look at the mission, the means, the method, and the motivation.

## **1. The Mission - Reconciliation**

First, the mission is one of reconciliation.

Look at verses 18-19 again:

*All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; [19] that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.*

Paul says that God's mission is to reconcile the world to himself. The word *reconcile* means *to restore to favor*. So, God's mission is to restore the world to favor with him. And before we talk about how this happens, I think we need to discuss why it needs to happen in the first place. Why does the world need restored to favor with God? I mean, what exactly is the problem? How did we fall out of favor in the first place? Well, the problem is that sin has separated us from God. Isaiah 59:2 tells us this:

*Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear. (Isaiah 59:2 ESV)*

Let me be clear about this. The biggest problem in the world today is separation from God as the result of sin. You know, due to the upcoming elections there is a great deal of discussion about all of the problems in the world today, and no little debate about what the biggest problem is. Most say it's the economy. Others say education. Some say immigration. Unfortunately, no one is saying the real problem is the fact that we are separated from God because of our sin. Plain and simple, God is holy and we are not. And because of this, we do not have his favor and are experiencing the consequences that separation from him brings. That's our problem. In fact, every other issue is simply a symptom of this problem.

Thankfully, however, God doesn't want it to be that way. He desires to be reconciled to us, and he took steps to make reconciliation possible. Now, if you think about it, this is amazing. I mean, who should actually be responsible for initiating reconciliation? It should be us, right? We are the offending party. If I sin against my wife, not that I ever do, whose responsibility is it to initiate reconciliation? It's mine. But when we were in need of reconciliation with God, it was he who took the first step, he who made it possible.

Romans 5:8 tells us this:

*But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8 ESV)*

God didn't wait around until we got our act together and came to ask his forgiveness. No, before we came to him, he came to us by sending his Son to die in our place. I think this highlights the fact that God is not a reluctant reconciler. He doesn't wait for us to come to him, no, he comes and seeks reconciliation with us. In fact, this is exactly how Jesus described his mission in Luke 19:10:

*For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost. (Luke 19:10 ESV)*

And I just want to say this morning, if you are separated from God; he is here today seeking you out. He is looking for you. He desires to be reconciled with you. But this does take action on your part. God takes the first and by far the biggest step, but you have to take a step yourself. You have to admit that your sin has separated you from him and that you are in need of reconciliation. You have to accept his gracious offer of forgiveness. And we would urge you to do this today and be reconciled to God once and for all.

So, the bad news is that because of our sin we are separated from God. But the good news is that reconciliation is possible. But this brings up another question, and that is how? How exactly does God reconcile us to himself? Well, for that we need to look at verse 21, where Paul explains the means to reconciliation.

### **The Means – Christ**

*For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

This, my friends, is one of the most precious verses in all of Scripture. In it we see what Martin Luther called the Great Exchange. The truth that God reconciles us by exchanging our sins for Christ's righteousness. By taking our sin and placing it on Christ, and taking Christ's righteousness and giving it to us.

Do you understand how marvelous this is? In order to be reconciled to God, we need two things to happen. One, we need to be forgiven of our sin, and two, we need to be made righteous in God's sight. Unfortunately, on our own neither of these things are possible. We can't earn forgiveness and no matter how good we are we can never be good enough to merit God's favor. Let me warn you this morning. Some of you are placing your hope of eternal life in the fact that you are a good person. But being good doesn't cut it. God requires perfection, and no matter how good you are, you aren't perfect. Even one little sin separates us from God.

However, for our sake, God did what we couldn't do on our own. He took our sin and placed it on Christ. In one fell swoop, God removed all of our sin and placed it on his Son. And at the same time, he also took Christ's righteousness and placed it on us. As a result, Christ suffered the penalty for our sin through death on the cross, and we are given the righteousness we need to be restored to a relationship with God.

Now, I hope that we all have at least a little glimmer of how truly wonderful this is. Think about it. All of our sin; past, present, and yes, even future, Christ paid for on the cross. It's gone. As far as the east is from the west, God remembers it no more. Not only that, but we now have the righteousness of Christ. God treats us as if we have lived the perfect life that Christ lived. When God looks at us, he doesn't see our sin, but rather his perfect, righteous Son. As a result, we can be confident today that we are right with God and will be for all eternity. And let me ask, what could be better than that? The answer is absolutely nothing.

## **The Method – Ambassadors**

So, the mission is reconciliation. The means is Christ. And verse 20 tells us that the method is ambassadors:

*Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.*

Paul is saying that God's chosen method for reconciling the world is sending out ambassadors with his message of reconciliation. Now, we probably all have an idea of what an ambassador is, but let's look at how Paul describes one in this passage.

### **1. All who are reconciled are ambassadors.**

First, he tells us that all those who reconciled are ambassadors. Look again at verse 18:

*All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.*

Do you see the connection here? If you have been reconciled to God, then you have become a minister of reconciliation. One of the great hindrances to understanding this is that we have come to use the term minister to refer only to pastors. But this is simply not the case. Let me ask you, who are the ministers in the room today? *Every single one of us who calls ourselves a follower of Christ is a minister.* Listen; if someone asks you who the minister is at Harmony Bible Church, you know what you should say? It's me. I am a minister at Harmony Bible Church. All of us are ministers. All of us are ambassadors. Every single last one of us. Friends, we just have to get this. The moment that we say, 'yes, I will follow Jesus', and are reconciled to God and we become his ambassadors for recruiting others to follow him. One of the greatest failures of the church today is that we haven't taught our people that to be a disciple means to make disciples. And I think if we are going to correct this we have to begin by recognizing that ministry is for everyone. Do you get it? We all are ministers, we are all ambassadors, we are all disciples, and we are all on mission.

### **2. Ambassadors are representatives.**

Ok, the second thing we learn about ambassadors in this passage is that they are representatives. We see this both in verse 19 and 20:

*That is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. [20] Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us.*

Plain and simple, as God's ambassadors, we represent him before a lost and dying world. God makes his appeal for reconciliation through us. And while we might question why he would choose such a faulty means for doing so, what I really want to consider is the tremendous privilege we have to represent Christ. I think one of the reasons we don't live on mission is that we don't understand what a tremendous privilege it is to be Christ's representative. Listen, God sent his Son to die on the cross for the sins of the world. To rescue humanity from an eternity in hell. To put the world back together again. That, my friends is what God is doing. That's what life is all about. And listen, God could have chosen any method he wanted to communicate his offer of reconciliation. He could have written it in the sky. He could have posted it on Facebook. He could have produced infomercials. He could have used animals or aliens. But the fact of the matter is that he has chosen you and me. He chooses to make his appeal to a lost and dying world through us. The King of the universe has entrusted us with the most important message ever, what a tremendous privilege!

### **3. Ambassadors speak with urgency.**

Ok, one last thing we learn about ambassadors. Because of the significance of the message they are entrusted with, ambassadors speak with urgency. The end of verse 20 says:

*We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.*

The word for implore could also be translated as urge, plead with, or even beg. Whichever word you want to use, I think it is fair to say this means that an ambassador does what ever is necessary to see people reconciled to God. And they do so because of what is at stake. To understand this, you have to think about the role of an ambassador a little bit differently than we do today. An ambassador in our day lives in one country as a representative of another. We are all aware of the American ambassador to Libya who was killed just a few weeks ago. He was in Libya representing and looking out for the concerns of America. However, ambassadorship in the 1<sup>st</sup> century was a little different. The Roman Emperor wouldn't send out ambassadors to live in foreign lands, but rather to convey to other nations his terms of peace. Essentially the Emperor's ambassador would travel to a foreign land and say, the Emperor offers you special privileges if you willingly submit to his rule. But if not, his army will come and make you submit. It's your choice. You can submit willingly or under compulsion. And that is what our ambassadorship is like. Jesus Christ is the

Sovereign King of all. By virtue of his obedient life, sacrificial death, and glorious resurrection, he has been granted power and authority over all things. And one day he is coming back to earth to exert his power and authority. Today, he offers his enemies the opportunity to be reconciled to him and willingly submit to his rule in their lives. But if they do not, there is a day coming when he will return and they will be compelled by his mighty power. As we saw in Philippians 2, his rule and reign are inevitable. Eventually every knee will bow and every tongue will confess him as Lord. The only question is whether it will be done willingly or under compulsion. And for those who are forced to submit, the end result will be eternity in hell. So, you see why as ambassadors we must speak with urgency. Billions of people are separated from God. Billions are on their way to hell. Billions that God desires to be reconciled to. And so we must have urgency about us. We must not waste time. We must implore, and plead and urge and do everything we can to see the lost accept God's gracious offer of reconciliation.

### **The Motivation – Love (v. 14-15)**

So, we have the mission – reconciliation. We have the means – Christ. We have the method – ambassadors. And now, let's finish with the motivation, and that is love. Look at verses 14-15:

*For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; [15] 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.*

Let's be honest. The truth of the matter is that it is possible for us to get everything we have talked about today and still not live on mission. It is possible to know that we have been sent, to know that we are ambassadors, to know that billions of people are headed to hell, and yet still have no real desire to make disciples. For many of you, I haven't shared anything new today. And that is why understanding the motivation for mission is critical. Because you can know what you should do, and you can even know how to do it, and still not really care to do it. But note what Paul says in verses 14-15. He says that the thing that makes us want to live for Christ is the love that he displayed on the cross. The word for *control* in verse 14 describes pressure that produces action. In other words, when we truly understand how much Christ really does love us it produces a pressure that propels us to live for him. And how does this happen? How do we become controlled by Christ's love? We do so by constantly reflecting on the cross. I know that Paul doesn't have this in sequential order, but I really believe that when he is talking about Christ dying for us he is referring to what he describes in verse 21, the fact that Christ took all of our sin upon himself and in exchange we received his righteousness. Here's my point, I think that in order to be a minister of

reconciliation, you have to grasp how wonderful it is to be reconciled. You have to understand how desperate, lost, and depraved you were, and how wonderfully Christ has rescued you. Because when you do it will overwhelm you in such a way that you won't be able to help but tell others about how they can be reconciled as well. I have said this several times before, but if we aren't living on mission our problem really isn't a mission problem, it's a worship problem. It's a lack of worship here (head) and here (heart), which leads to a lack of mission here (hands). And I hope that you now see this all starting to come together. Why is worship so important? One big reason is that it motivates us to live on mission. And why is community so important? One big reason is that we have to encourage one another to worship and to live on mission. Worship, community, and mission are all vital to one another, and the fact of the matter is when you are missing one, you will likely be missing the others as well. And my hope is that today, and in the days ahead, we together as a community will worship Jesus so much that we won't be able to keep ourselves from living on mission for Him.

Let me conclude with this today. Over the past several months I have been reading through the Gospel of Matthew in preparation for our next series. And as I have read, the Spirit has compelled me to begin to pray that the Lord would mobilize our church for mission. That he would begin to send us out in mass to make disciples. This, of course, comes from Matthew 9:

*When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. [37] Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; [38] therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." (Matthew 9:36-38 ESV)*

This is the prayer that I have started to pray daily for our church. That God would send us out into the harvest. Jesus says the harvest is plentiful. There are many people ready to be reconciled if someone will go to them and share the message of reconciliation. And so I want to ask you if you will commit to pray with me that this will happen.

But more than praying for God to send others out, I am wondering if today there are those who are ready and willing to go. Are we willing to respond to God's call as Isaiah was? Are we willing to say, 'here am I send me?' And by going, I don't necessarily mean getting on a plane and going halfway around the world, although if that's where God sends you then let's talk about how to make it happen. By going I mean sharing the gospel with whomever we have the opportunity. So, will you go? Will you live on mission? Will you say to the one who has reconciled you, here I am, send me?

Scripture quotations are taken from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers.

© 2012 by Chris Carr. You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that: (1) you credit the author, (2) any modifications are clearly marked, (3) you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, (4) you include Harmony Bible Church's website address ([www.harmonybiblechurch.org](http://www.harmonybiblechurch.org)) on the copied resource.