

## What If Jesus Was Serious...About The Church?

Week 8: Chapters 40-43

### Chapter 40 ~ If Jesus Was Serious...Then A Church Must Define A Disciple Before It Can Make Them

The Great Commission, as we call it, comes from Jesus' final words to His disciples in Matthew chapter 28 (though some version of the same idea can be found in each gospel account as well as in the book of Acts). It reads, *"Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* (Matthew 28:18-20, emphasis added).

Additionally, and based on that, the mission of the United Methodist Church is *"To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world."* And pretty much every other church/congregation has some variation of that as its mission statement.

Making disciples is inherently a duplicative or reproductive process. Whether it happens by addition or by multiplication matters little (though given our American penchant to value bigger, faster, and more efficient, we definitely prefer the results of multiplication). This idea of replication is also seen in Paul's words to Timothy, *"And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others."* (II Timothy 2:2)

I can tell you firsthand as one who studied ministry in school that this idea of passing on the faith is ingrained in us. In fact, the reason you and I are Christians today is because this process has been going on for two thousand years. At the same time, it doesn't take much effort to look around at Christians/the Church, past and present, and recognize that some pretty terrible things have been done by so-called Christians in the name of Jesus. What's up with that?

Imagine you have a key and you make a copy of it. Then you make a copy of that copy...then a copy of that copy...and so on. Sooner or later, some iteration of that copied key is no longer going to work in the lock. Why? Because it differs too much from the original. Good, healthy discipleship is about making "copies" of Jesus (the original)...not copies of flawed humans.

A "disciple" is literally a student, a follower, an apprentice of a master. Obviously, in this case, the Master is Jesus. The goal of a disciple/follower/apprentice is to BECOME like the Master, meaning to embrace and embody the vision, values, priorities, focus, and way of the Master.

To Skye's point in this chapter, the problem is when we exchange the goal and process of becoming like Jesus for the goal of keeping the institution going. Ironically, the only reason the institution exists is to make disciples of Jesus, but the process of making disciples doesn't/can't happen institutionally. Hmm, that's a conundrum, isn't it? Sadly, the way most churches go about being/doing church tends not to lend itself to making disciples of Jesus.

To say it another way, we first must BE disciples before we can MAKE disciples. Unfortunately, churches are full of regular service attenders who may even wear the label of “Christian” but who are not, and have no intention of being, disciples of Jesus. Again, this is a conundrum, which ought to cause us to question/examine why and how we do what we do.

I’ll end with a call back to something mentioned in an earlier series. Being a disciple of Jesus is about: Being with Jesus...in order to Become like Jesus...and to Do as Jesus did.

- *What is a disciple (and specifically, a disciple of Jesus)?*
- *How is a disciple made?*
- *How would you know if you met a disciple? What are the traits, qualities, characteristics you would expect to see in a disciple of Jesus. (Try to be as specific as you can.)*
- *Describe your process of becoming a disciple of Jesus.*
- *Why do you think there are so many “Christians” and so few disciples?*

#### Chapter 41 ~ If Jesus Was Serious...Then His Mission And The Church’s Are Cosmic In Scope

How would you articulate the mission of Jesus and His Church? There are many ways to say the same thing, so how do you like to describe it? Here’s one way...to proclaim and promote the reign of Christ over every aspect of human life and over every atom in existence. (High Christology, baby!)

So when we think about our little spiritual family that meets together at the corner of 71st and Shadeland in Indianapolis, we need to keep the scope and magnitude of what we’re really a part of in mind. And it would be good to see how everything we do ties into, or plays a part of, that grand mission. (And if it doesn’t, then there’s no reason for us to be doing it.)

While all this probably makes pretty good sense, we must also acknowledge the easy temptation to forget that, to take our eyes/attention off the big picture. Additionally, and as Skye points out, there is an “...*instinct to prioritize certain people, things, and activities over others*”, which leads to viewing certain people/activities as “sacred” and others as “secular”. And while we can find such categorizing in the Old Testament, it is ultimately Jesus from whom we take our cues...and Jesus (God become human) obliterates such distinctions.

We must beware of defining our mission, and discipleship in general, too narrowly. It is literally, truly, all-encompassing. No area of life or existence is off limits.

An important ordering of things to keep in mind is that our Christology (our understanding of Jesus) informs our Missiology (our understanding of the mission) which informs our

Ecclesiology (our understanding of the Church). To get that out of order, or backwards, leads to institutionalism and perhaps even idolatry. We, the Church, cannot properly understand ourselves except in relation to Jesus and His mission/purpose.

- *How would you describe/articulate the mission of Jesus and His Church?*
- *What happens if we define our mission, and discipleship in general, too narrowly? What results of such a narrow view have you observed?*
- *As you consider your experience of the Christian life and being part of a church, what has been the emphasis regarding the Church's reason for existence?*
- *How have you seen the sacred/secular dichotomy play out?*

#### Chapter 42 ~ If Jesus Was Serious...Then We Must Resist The Temptations Of Technology

The irony is not lost on me that as I sit here typing away about the dangers of technology I'm using a computer and a cloud-based application that is wirelessly connected to the internet. (Sometimes you just have to chuckle.)

We must remember that the Church's primary tasks are to proclaim/declare AND embody/demonstrate the Gospel and to become like Jesus through apprenticeship to Him. I have no issue with using technology to whatever extent it can contribute toward this end. But, as Skye points out, it has some significant limitations that we need to recognize.

But I also want to add another danger of technology, and that's the distractedness it causes. In order to love, we need to be attentive. But technology, namely our screens/devices, vies for our attention...and we easily give our attention to them. In fact, our attention is presently being commodified. Businesses and advertisers are doing everything they can to keep our attention on our screens. It is really hard to be what we're called to be and do what we're called to do if we're giving our attention elsewhere.

- *What advantages and disadvantages do you see with the Church using the technology at our disposal? Or, what should we use technology for and what should we not rely on technology for?*
- *How much of your time and attention is spent on a device/screen? How is that forming you? What impact is that having on you?*

## Chapter 43 ~ If Jesus Was Serious...Then We Don't Have To Change Our Circumstances To Change The World

For whatever reason we humans tend to be highly susceptible to dualistic thinking and thereby are prone to create false dichotomies (i.e. creating categories that need not exist). A dichotomy that Christians like to hold on to is the idea of sacred vs. secular. This gets played out in what sorts of activities we consider mission/ministry related or spiritual in orientation and which ones we consider worldly, unspiritual, or secular. But, friends, the incarnation of Jesus (God become flesh) obliterates this dualistic type thinking. (see comments on Chapter 41).

Skye drives home the point this way, *“For Christ to rule over all things means welcoming the presence of heaven into the earthly things we are already doing.”* We pray in this direction every week we're together, *“Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”*

Perhaps another way of saying this is that ALL of life is sacramental. Every nook and cranny of life falls under the good reign of Jesus. As such, there's no need to elevate certain activities, vocations, or people as more “spiritual” or “holy”. Jesus wants representatives/ambassadors of His everywhere...in business, in education, in manufacturing, in art, in the trades...everywhere...and, yes, even in politics. In other words, “church work” isn't the only arena of God's activity.

A pastor or missionary is no more special than a mechanic, plumber, doctor, librarian, etc. And no matter what situation/circumstance we find ourselves in, we have the opportunity to represent/reflect the Lordship of Jesus right there. How we go about engaging in the mission of Christ may take a different shape, flavor, or style depending upon our situation/circumstance, but we are disciples of Jesus anywhere and everywhere we go...at home, at work, at school, in our neighborhood, at the store, etc.

As Skye ends this chapter, *“Being a disciple who participates in God's mission means living your life, doing your work, engaging your relationships, and inhabiting your community with Christ and in a manner that manifests His rule right where you are.”*

- *How are you tempted (or how do you tend to) elevate certain activities, vocations, or people as more “spiritual” or “sacred”? Or, how/when do you see this happen? Why do you think there is such a strong tendency toward this?*
- *As you consider all the various aspects and elements of your life, how does your discipleship to Jesus come to bear in each of them? (To clarify, while our discipleship to Jesus ought to inform every aspect of our lives, that doesn't mean it should or will look the same in every part of our lives.)*
- *Are there any reflections from last week's Scripture readings that you'd like to share?*

## Soul Training Exercises

- Read & Reflect on...
  - Matthew 28:16-20
  - John 17:13-24
  - I Corinthians 15:20-28
  - Colossians 1:15-20
  - Luke 24:36-43
  - Acts 2:42-47
  - I Corinthians 7:17-24
  
- Screen/Device & Media Fast
  - Given that there was a chapter on technology, you probably saw this exercise/invitation coming. Our relationship with technology is something that would be healthy to regularly examine to see how it is forming/affecting us. In addition to that, we're in a pretty crazy season politically, socially, and culturally. Sometimes the best thing we can do for our mental and emotional health is take a break from it.
  - So, with that in mind, this week's invitation is to unplug for a day (or longer if you can/want). Take in no news/media. Just give it a rest. As you do so, notice what's going on inside you (or not going on inside you) due to taking a break. (Hint: in all likelihood, the longer the break, the more you'll notice.) Take note of how you feel and what you fill your time with.
  - Allow this fast from screen/device and media to allow you to examine your relationship with technology, and allow it to help you reconnect with others (Jesus, family, friends)...and maybe yourself.