

ON MISSION with JESUS
Our Calling as Jesus' Disciples
Matthew 28:18-20 and Jeremiah 28
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It wasn't intentional on my part—though it seems God frequently orchestrates things I'm blissfully unaware of—but today's message, "Our Calling as Jesus' Disciples," dovetails nicely with the "Sinners & Saints" series we finished last week. The basic premise of that series was if God can use the flawed people that He did in the Old Testament to accomplish great things for Him, He can surely use you and me as well.

The Scriptures are clear: God calls us to partner with Him, but followers of Jesus are notorious for making the simplicity of Jesus' calling way too complex. We take spiritual gift inventories, get trained in classes, and spend money and energy developing mission statements—and those can all be helpful—but sometimes I'm convinced we're making things much too complicated.

In Luke 19:10, after extending salvation to the reviled tax collector Zacchaeus, Jesus explained his personal mission clearly and concisely: "For the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost." Jesus came to lead people who were not in relationship with God into a relationship with their Heavenly Father, but Jesus' mission didn't end with Him. It included his immediate disciples and all of us who would later follow Him.

Later in Matthew's Gospel, chapter 28, Jesus appeared to his disciples on a mountain after He was resurrected. The last recorded words from this encounter are known as The Great Commission. Jesus said, "All authority on 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" (Matthew 28:18–20). Jesus' calling for every follower of his and for every church is that we are reaching people who don't know Him and discipling people to obey Him.

In case his disciples didn't get the message, Jesus repeated it for them several weeks later in his last words before He went up to heaven. In Acts 1:8, Jesus told his followers, "But

you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

These are familiar verses, but I’m sharing them to reinforce that Jesus’ call for each of his followers is to reach out to those who don’t know Him so they, too, can walk in relationship with Him. Regardless of our personality, age, the length of time you’ve followed Jesus, or our level of theological training, Jesus has called us to reach those who don’t know Him. Jesus identifies us as salt and light in our world. Salt flavors and preserves, and light pierces the darkness to provide direction and guidance. In *The Message*, Eugene Peterson paraphrases Matthew 5:13–14 to say that as salt, we draw out the God flavors in our world, and as light, we highlight the God colors. We can’t escape the fact that Jesus calls us to the mission of helping those around us learn to know and walk in relationship with Him, and yet we tend to make it so difficult.

I’m not saying sharing our faith with others is easy. It’s not easy, but our calling is clear. We live in a culture that is increasingly uninterested and at times hostile to faith in Jesus and to what we’re doing in our churches. There was a time not all that long ago when all a church had to do was hold a revival service, host a Vacation Bible School or put on some special event, and the unchurched in the community would show up. For the most part, those days are past. That’s not to say we shouldn’t hold Bible schools or special events or invite people to worship services, but the receptivity level even since the year 2000 has dropped considerably and is dropping more all the time. We can wring our hands over those changes and wish things were like they used to be back in the 1980s and ’90s, or we can embrace the openness people still have to want us to share our lives with them. Our family members, friends and neighbors who don’t go to church and don’t know Jesus are probably disinclined to attend church functions, but what they are interested in is what’s going on in our lives. They’re often open to hearing how Jesus has changed our life and how our relationship with Him impacts the way we live. It used to be that the church and its programs were a vehicle that often led people into a relationship with Jesus. Now the primary way people begin a relationship with Jesus is through the people they love and trust. Our mission hasn’t changed, but the pathway people typically walk to a relationship with Jesus has.

Along with Bible verses and passages that frame our calling to help people in our sphere of influence know Jesus, throughout this series, I've asked a number of people to share what it looks like for them to live on mission with Jesus. My hope is that as you listen to their stories and as I share some from my own experience, the Holy Spirit will give you insights about what sharing Jesus with others can look like in your life. I want to invite Gabi Fish to come up and share with us how she's living on mission with Jesus.

Gabi's Testimony

I've discovered that living on mission with God, while not all the time, can be hard and requires a lot of trust. For example, speaking in front of all of you is scary for me, but when Pastor Layne asked me to do it and I said I needed to pray on it, my husband said to me "you know what God is going to say," I just said "yea, I know, but I need a minute to be okay with it." For me, living on mission with God has been a mix of using the skills God has blessed me with, and stepping outside of my comfort zone and trusting him to work through my fears towards His ultimate good.

More specifically, I have been asked to talk about how my work with Peace Promise relates to how I live on mission with God. The first time I heard of Peace Promise, Pastor Susan had briefly mentioned that they were looking for someone who could help them with budgeting. Being that I had 2 degrees in accounting and was in the midst of my doctorate, also in accounting, I felt like I could use my skills to help. Well, that was just the beginning of what God had in mind for me. When I first joined Peace Promise, I knew they did something with women in the commercial sex industry. Overtime, I learned that this organization, which many of you know well, was following a holy calling by God to not only be someone for these women who have no one, but to fight for them and beside them as they take back their lives! I learned that Peace Promise does what Christians are called to do in Isaiah 1:17 "seek justice, correct oppression, bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause" and psalm 82:3 "Give justice to the weak and fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute." The more I got to know the people within this organization and the women

that they served, the more I felt like it was something I wanted to be part of. Mind you, I was the youngest person in the room at all of our meetings, I was actually mistaken for a teenager by our Executive Director's husband. So, I was feeling a little less than sure that I was actually going to be of use. Sure enough, a year later, I was asked to take over the Treasurer position, which included doing all of the accounting work as well, to which I said yes, whole heartedly!

Living on mission with God however is not just about saying yes when it seems like the right fit. It would make sense for me to say, yea I can do a position that I have now earned 3 degrees for, I am more than qualified for that! Living on mission with God is walking into something knowing that God has plans bigger than you, but that He will be there to fill in the spaces where you might not seem qualified. Let me tell you, when it came to handling the emotions related to the stories we heard on a regular basis, or thinking about getting into the nitty gritty and being part of these ladies' lives, I felt so underqualified! I hadn't faced that type of hardship in my life, how could I begin to help!? Well, God fills the gaps, and sometimes already has them filled before you realize it. God slowly nudged me closer and closer to the nitty gritty in ways I was more okay with. One of the first situations where I spent any time with one of our ladies, I was there to help her set up a budget. Budgets are easy, I can do that. Well, she also had 2 kiddos and 1 on the way. God put me in a room with a young mom who I could relate to! That interaction turned into me sharing the clothing my own kiddos outgrew with her, messaging her to ask about how her and the kids were doing, and just being there for her. I realized that I don't need to understand every life situation our women find themselves in, in order to live God's mission for me. While it is still hard and heartbreaking to listen to these women open up, it is also so rewarding to see them dream and strive for a better life! Like I said before, living on mission with God can be hard and it will push you, but it is incredibly rewarding.

Thanks, Gabi, for being willing to share with us and for all you do in your ministry with Peace Promise. I love that Gabi highlighted doing a task for a ministry that seeks justice for people and that, in the context of that task, she was also able to connect with a mom of young children and share her life with her. When I talk about being on mission with Jesus, there's no standard template of what it looks like. God has uniquely made each of us, and his call is for us to be who we are and use the gifts, abilities, and experience He has blessed us with to point others to Him.

I want to look now at Jeremiah 28. This may seem like an odd text to use in a sermon about missional living, but I believe there are powerful insights for us here. Jeremiah lived and prophesied for God to the nation of Judah in the 7th Century B.C. God called Jeremiah as a young man to prophesy to Judah that their unfaithfulness would lead to disaster—that a nation from the north would come and besiege the capitol city of Jerusalem and take over their nation. And early in Jeremiah's ministry, that's exactly what happened. The northern nation of Babylon, led by King Nebuchadnezzar, attacked Jerusalem and deported its residents to Babylon. Being forcibly taken from your homeland to a foreign nation is difficult for anyone, but it was especially traumatic for the Jewish people, because God had given them their land and they had a strong attachment to it.

Jeremiah had been prophesying to God's people that their time in Babylon wasn't going to be short. As we'll see next week, he gave them specific instructions about how they were to live, but the Jewish people wanted to believe that their time in Babylon would be quick. In chapter 28, a false prophet named Hananiah prophesied to the people exactly what their ears wanted to hear. I encourage you to follow along as I read Jeremiah 28.

In the fifth month of that same year, the fourth year, early in the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah, the prophet Hananiah son of Azzur, who was from Gibeon, said to me in the house of the LORD in the presence of the priests and all the people: ²“This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: ‘I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon. ³Within two years I will bring back to this place all the articles of the LORD's house that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon removed from here and took to Babylon. ⁴I will also

bring back to this place Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim king of Judah and all the other exiles from Judah who went to Babylon,' declares the LORD, 'for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon.'”

⁵ Then the prophet Jeremiah replied to the prophet Hananiah before the priests and all the people who were standing in the house of the LORD. ⁶ He said, “Amen! May the LORD do so! May the LORD fulfill the words you have prophesied by bringing the articles of the LORD’s house and all the exiles back to this place from Babylon. ⁷ Nevertheless, listen to what I have to say in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people: ⁸ From early times the prophets who preceded you and me have prophesied war, disaster and plague against many countries and great kingdoms. ⁹ But the prophet who prophesies peace will be recognized as one truly sent by the LORD only if his prediction comes true.”

¹⁰ Then the prophet Hananiah took the yoke off the neck of the prophet Jeremiah and broke it, ¹¹ and he said before all the people, “This is what the LORD says: ‘In the same way I will break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon off the neck of all the nations within two years.’” At this, the prophet Jeremiah went on his way.

¹² After the prophet Hananiah had broken the yoke off the neck of the prophet Jeremiah, the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: ¹³ “Go and tell Hananiah, ‘This is what the LORD says: You have broken a wooden yoke, but in its place you will get a yoke of iron. ¹⁴ This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: I will put an iron yoke on the necks of all these nations to make them serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and they will serve him. I will even give him control over the wild animals.’”

¹⁵ Then the prophet Jeremiah said to Hananiah the prophet, “Listen, Hananiah! The LORD has not sent you, yet you have persuaded this nation to trust in lies. ¹⁶ Therefore this is what the LORD says: ‘I am about to remove you from the face of the earth. This very year you are going to die, because you have preached rebellion against the LORD.’”

¹⁷ In the seventh month of that same year, Hananiah the prophet died. (Jeremiah 28:1-17)

As I finish reading that passage, you might still be scratching your heads asking, “What in the world does that have to do with living on mission with Jesus?” It’s a legitimate question that I hope becomes clearer next week as we explore Jeremiah’s counter-response to the people of God. For now, I’d like to point out that behind Hananiah’s word to the people of Judah was the idea that they weren’t to engage in life in Babylon. Hananiah was speaking to the people’s desire to close their eyes and just get through the next couple months or years quickly until they could return to Jerusalem and resume their normal lives.

Here’s the connection to my sermon today and to our series: as followers of Jesus who look with anticipation to eternity with Jesus in heaven, it’s tempting for us to see this world as just passing by and to resist actively in engaging in our world. While Jesus and the New Testament authors tells us we’re citizens of heaven and to focus our minds and hearts on the life to come, they also call us to invest in God’s kingdom here on earth while we live here. As Jesus prayed in the prayer He taught his disciples, “Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). Next week, we’ll look more closely at Jeremiah’s instructions to the Jews who had been deported to Babylon, but for now, the focus on Jesus’ heart for each of us as his followers is to pray and to work to see his prayer fulfilled: “May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

Katrina Collins is an Administrative Assistant at Mechanicsburg Senior High School, and in this video that we’re going to watch, she talks about how that role is a platform for her to partner with Jesus in doing his work in our world.

[Katrina Collins video testimony](#)

Thanks, Katrina. We’re blessed to have you serving our school district. My hope is that through the basic foundations I’ve laid this morning and through Gabi and Katrina’s testimonies, you’ve been challenged to think in a fresh way about what it looks like for you to fulfill Jesus’ call to reach those who don’t know Jesus. Gabi and Katrina have very different personalities, they’re at different stages in life as mothers, and they serve in completely different

environments, but both of them are living on mission with Jesus. So, what does it look like for you to live on mission with Jesus in your life?

One of the challenges I think we frequently bump into when it comes to sharing our faith is our expectation that the results will be quickly noticed. In contrast, my experience is that being on mission with Jesus is often a long process that doesn't always have very immediate or discernible results. I'm convinced one of the important traits that's necessary for followers of Jesus as we partner with Him is persistence.

As I think about persistence in partnering with God in his mission, I think about the relationship McBIC has developed with the Mechanicsburg School District—the district in which our church is located. Specifically, I'm thinking of our relationship with the school's athletic department. In the late 1990s, Craig and Laura Brown's son Travis played football. Those of you whose kids play sports know that it's practically impossible not to get sucked into volunteering—I mean, have the opportunity to serve 😊—for the team's booster club in some way. Craig and Laura were the Football Booster Club presidents, and they arranged for the football team to begin having spaghetti dinners in the church youth center on Thursday nights several times each season. That enabled me to build a relationship with the head coach, Rich Lichtel, and his staff and with the players.

Fast forward several years and Stacy Poe, who at that time was our church's office administrator, began coaching the high school field hockey team. She arranged with our youth pastor, Blaine Kimball, to take Italian ice to the team during their summer pre-season practice. I thought that was a great idea, and I also began taking Italian ice to the football and soccer teams, whose coaches I knew. Nearly 25 years later and each year except for two COVID seasons, I've taken Italian ice to multiple sports teams in Mechanicsburg, and at times to CV and Northern's teams. This year, I took ice to over 250 student athletes and coaches on seven different teams. Over nearly a quarter of century, McBIC has provided Italian ice for thousands of student athletes. It's a simple thing to do, but it has created a connection between students, coaches, families, the school and our church. While I can't draw a direct line between taking Italian ice to sports teams and people coming to Jesus, I know that the relationships that have

been developed through this simple, consistent act have opened doors for me, our staff and our church to minister to students, parents, and coaches.

As we conclude this morning, I'd like you to reflect on two simple questions:

1) Did God stir anything in you as you heard Gabi and Katrina's testimonies? What does it look like for you to live on mission with Jesus in your life? 2) As you think about the example of providing Italian Ice to sports teams, is there anything you sense God calling you to consistently do to bless others and share Jesus' love with them?

To wrap up, I'd like us to read Philippians 2:14–15 aloud. These are some of my favorite verses that speak to the potential each of us has to be a witness for Jesus in our world.

“Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation. Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life.” – Philippians 2:14–15