

Matthew 23-07-05b

We're ready to continue our examination of what it is to make disciples, how disciples are made, who makes disciples specifically. And you can run a little experiment for yourself. If you pull up your favorite search engine and put in something like making disciples and look at the results, if you want a quick summary, there's just an infinitude.

This is the universal, seemingly universal understanding. The process of making disciples starts with evangelism, continues with a lifetime of growth, commonly referred to as discipleship. We describe discipleship as helping others to grow in faith and fruitfulness.

Helping others to grow in faith and fruitfulness. This is typical. What's really fun is switch over to the image search and just look at the posters.

I was looking for something to put on live stream for this study. And I chose a little picture of the text of Matthew 28, 19, and 20. But if you do that search, I just put into DuckDuckGo, making disciples.

And one of the first little posters here is disciple. Be one, make one. Making disciples, making disciples.

Go and make disciples. Fulfilling the great commission of making disciples. And when disciples make disciples, the church grows, et cetera, et cetera.

And God bless them. I empathize with the spirit of love and concern and a desire to see the church grow, to see believers come to maturity and to have a healthy, fruitful walk with Christ. The intentions behind so much of this are genuinely heartfelt love and concern for others.

And God will bless that. And all of us have misunderstandings. We strike the rock and God brings water out of it anyway.

It doesn't mean that there are not consequences for misunderstanding and not being careful. And the danger, I ask myself, why didn't God just set it up the way everybody thinks it is, which is, well, somebody made me a disciple. I'm gonna make you a disciple and you go make somebody else a disciple and we're just gonna have this, crack the balls on the billiard table thing where Jesus was the cue ball and now all of the balls are hitting each other and knocking each other into the disciple pockets.

But he didn't. And it's very carefully and explicitly detailed in the New Testament that there is a center on Jesus Christ with God on one side as the originator and the apostles on the other side as the communicators. Jesus left and he said, you are going to be my witnesses.

You, by communicating what I have taught you, teach as you make these disciples, what

do you do? He didn't say mentor them. He didn't say invest in them. He didn't say, he said, teach them.

You teach them to observe the truths, the commandments, the things that I have commanded you to teach. What does Paul tell Timothy? The verb and noun for disciple to become a disciple, to make a disciple or the noun disciple, *mathetuo* is the verb and the noun that comes from that are only found in the Gospels and Acts. Nowhere in any of the epistles are we finding any reference to disciples, not in Corinth, not in the region of Galatia, not in Laodicea, the Ephesian letter, which is the Laodicean letter, not in Philippi, not in Colossae, not in Thessalonica in either letter.

These seminal foundational essential instructions from the apostle Paul to the disciples of the nations is to grow in grace and knowledge, to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, not to transform one another, not to, we can exhort and encourage one another in the truth. We can speak to one another in Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. Why? That's the truth.

And in communicating truth, our, and it's, you could say, well, but these people that are making disciples, aren't they doing it by teaching the word of God and talking about Jesus and talking about the disciples and Peter taking his eyes off the Lord and sinking into the water and being pulled back out? And isn't it, aren't you, isn't it just semantics? Aren't you just, you know, splitting hairs here and can't we help each other be followers of Christ? Turn with me to Acts chapter 14. I will remind you of John chapter six that we saw in the first session. I'm tempted to review it, but just remember what happened after Jesus fed the multitudes.

They started following him for the wrong reasons. They wanted to make him a king. They followed him around the sea and back, tried to figure out how he got there.

And he said, you're following me because you ate of the loaves and were filled, not because you saw and understood the sign. You're not following me because you are committing to being my disciple. You're following me because of what you can get out of it.

And it is so easy to become subjective. Quick review here, pop quiz. What are the three primary categories of subjectivity? Eyes on self, eyes on people, eyes on circumstances, right? We are so prone to subjectivity, you can't believe it.

Here are people who see Jesus perform the miraculous feeding, as well as his many other healing miracles, and they are following him out of subjectivity. If I follow him, I can get something out of it. And the heart is deceitful above all things, desperately wicked.

Who can grasp just how wicked and deceitful it is? Who can understand it? Our hearts

are deceitful. We deceive ourselves. We tell ourselves, well, I am doing this for the betterment of mankind.

What about altruistic unbelievers who give millions of dollars to cancer research and children's hospitals and other quote-unquote worthy causes, what is the motivation? If they are unbelievers, separated from the life of God, the wrath of God abides on them, and yet they are doing quote-unquote good things, my famous and oft-repeated example is Al Capone, giving all kinds of money to charity in Chicago, and people loved him for it. But inevitably, unavoidably, there is a self-interest in so doing. Athletes who make a lot of money from their team contracts, and then they start a charity, they start a thing.

Even as they are helping people, there is a return. I feel good about myself. I feel like I am now perceived as a better person by others because I have done this thing.

It's subtle. You can say, but isn't it actually intrinsically good? Well, let's think about that. What is intrinsic good? What is intrinsically good? If somebody is hungry and I give him a sandwich, is that intrinsically good? There is none good but God.

Why do you call me good master? There's none good but God. If you knew what you were saying and you were addressing me as the son of God, as the one who the father sent, okay, but you're not. You're calling me good, but you don't understand goodness.

There is none good but God, Jesus said. And there is no good in this world that isn't connected to God. If it is intrinsic good, if it is actually good, it is connected to God.

It springs from his life. It reflects his character. It partakes of his righteousness.

Handing somebody a sandwich is a human definition of good. Doing somebody a favor, any unbeliever can do that. And as a pastor of many of our early life acquaintance was often to say, anything the unbeliever can do is not the Christian way of life.

And all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags, menstrual rags is the word in Hebrew. Our righteous, what we think is righteous because it doesn't connect to God, does not partake of God is bloody rags. That's what scripture says.

So no, altruistic helping of others. And we have to suspect ourselves of this. Am I getting some sort of emotional return out of doing a thing? Am I doing this because I am taking up my cross and following Christ? Am I exercising the kind of divine love that is sacrificial to self and beneficial to someone else because I am a follower of Jesus? Because I want him and through him the father to be pleased with me.

I want to be vindicated in his sight. I want to be presented faultless before the throne of grace. Psalm 51, purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean.

Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow. What do I have that I did not receive? If I share what I have, my time, my talent, my skill, my resources, whatever it is I have, if I speak the truth to someone in love, am I hoping to be well thought of? Am I hoping to think better of myself? Or am I looking through the veil into the holy of holies and trusting that the God who dwells between the cherubim is going to be genuinely pleased. Imagine how the Lord Jesus felt when he heard the voice from heaven say, this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.

That's our goal. Anything short of that is corrupt. It's leaven in the dough.

A little leaven leavens the whole thing. A little bit of self-interest, a little bit of self-gratification, a little bit of my hand reaching around to pat myself on the back or looking to see if someone else is going to pat me on the back or if someone is going to appreciate me and that's why I'm doing it. It is a wonderful thing to be appreciated.

All of us appreciate being appreciated. But if I start doing things to be appreciated, if I do things to impress, if I do things to avoid being ill thought of, if it is the opinion of someone else that is somehow implicated in my motivation, I am not bearing my cross. I have spoiled the broth.

I have corrupted and infected the entire process with sin, with self-interest. This is what happened. Jesus fed the multitudes.

Some of them figured out who he was from the sign. Others wanted to take him by force and make him king. I will make you king.

This is what is going on today with a lot of the kingdom talk. A lot of the, this is the kingdom and I am doing kingdom work and people are taking Jesus and making him king by force. And they seem good-hearted.

They seem well-intentioned. They want society to be better. They're genuinely concerned and have a heartfelt pity for those who are unfortunate.

But that is not an excuse. And it is not a defense at the judgment because we have the truth and we have the spirit and God will make his son king in his own time, in his own way, in that hour that no one knows, not even the son, God is going to make him king. Where is he right now? Sit thou at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.

It is authority. It is structure. It is timing and it is set by the father.

The Lord Jesus chose his witnesses, chose his apostles. And we cannot elbow our way into that group. We become disciples.

We can speak the truth, which is something that everyone needs to make themselves

become a disciple, to be discipled by the Lord Jesus, by the Holy Spirit, by the truth. But as soon as we start implicating ourselves into that process, and I am going to be the grace by which you become something desirable, it's a slippery slope. Acts chapter 14.

This is the apostle Paul. We're in the vicinity of Lystra and Derbe in Iconium. It happened in Iconium that they went together to the synagogue of the Jews.

They, these are Paul and Barnabas. You look back in the previous chapter, verse 46, Paul and Barnabas grew bold. It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first.

Since you rejected and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. Paul and Barnabas. The Lord has commanded us.

I have set you as a light to the Gentiles that you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth. The Gentiles heard this and were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. This is a good thing.

Glorify the word of the Lord. Jesus said, let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your father, not glorify you. The word of the Lord, verse 49, was being spread throughout all the region.

That's 1339. But the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women, the chief men of the city, raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, expelled them from their region. So they shook the dust off from their feet against them and came to Iconium.

And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit. Now it happened in Iconium. They went together to the synagogue of the Jews, spoke that a great multitude, both of Jews and Greeks, believed.

But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren. They stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of his grace. Bearing witness to the word of his grace.

Do you see the emphasis on the word, the truth, the word, the truth, communication of the truth, coming from an apostolic inspired, divinely commissioned source, the apostle Paul and his companions. Granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. That is the presence of the spirit.

This is how disciples are made, the word and the spirit. Multitudes of the city were divided, part sided with the Jews, part with the apostles. Violent attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews with their rulers to abuse and stone them.

They became aware of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lyconia and to the surrounding region. And they were preaching the gospel there. So then there is the

healing of the cripple in Lystra.

People saw what Paul had done in verse 11. They raised their voices saying in the Lyconian language, the gods have come down to us in the likeness of men. Pay attention now, what happens? Paul is speaking the truth.

God is confirming it with the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Presence and power of the Holy Spirit. The people misconstrued it.

These men are something special. The gods have come down to us. Barnabas they called Zeus, Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker.

Notice, Paul the apostle is the chief speaker. So the priest of Zeus, whose temple was in front of the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gate, intending to sacrifice with the multitudes. When the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard this, they tore their clothes and ran in among the multitude, crying out and saying, men, why are you doing these things? We also are men with the same nature as you.

We preached to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth and the sea and all things that are in them. Who in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless, he did not leave himself without witness in that he did good.

Gave us rain from heaven, fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness. With these sayings, they could scarcely restrain the multitudes from sacrificing to them. It is an innate instinctive reaction that we as human beings have, that when the witness of God comes, the word of God comes, the power of the spirit comes, we want to implicate those by whom it came and turn them into something that God did not intend them to be.

They did this to the Lord Jesus himself. They tried to turn the Lord Jesus into something that he was not intended to be at that time and in that place. We will take him by force and make him king.

He is going to be king, but you're not gonna make him king. Nobody makes Jesus king except the father. The father anoints the son.

Thou art my son. Today, I have begotten you. Today, I have anointed you.

Today, I have commissioned you. The father determines the times and the seasons. The Lord Jesus determines who his witnesses are and we are not to turn them into something they are not.

People think that every single thing Paul did in the book of Acts is inspired and correct, and it wasn't. Paul makes mistakes. Paul does things he shouldn't do.

He defies the witness and the testimony of the Holy Spirit and goes back to Jerusalem, which he was manifestly not supposed to do. But Paul became subjective. He wanted to vindicate his apostolic standing amongst those who were in Jerusalem.

And so he was gonna take this gift and say, look, my sheep out here, my converts in the Gentile regions are fruitful and should be respected and should be admired and accepted. Here's their gift to you. And what happened when he back to Jerusalem? It was a disaster.

It's an unmitigated disaster. He didn't convince anybody. It stirred up strife and division.

James gets him all tangled up in legalism and it is an unmitigated disaster. We should not take the apostle Paul and try to make him an inspired example. Only the Lord Jesus is an inspired example.

We can take the words of the apostle Paul that are inspired. So Jews from Antioch and Iconium came and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead. Here's the problem with people making disciples.

If somebody can make you a disciple, somebody can subvert you into a different kind of discipleship. If you start listening to the testimony of people, one testimony is as good as another. And if you go to the, what I would call the mainstream deconstruct, reconstruct movement today, progressive Christianity today, it is like listening to that dire word what was his Dr. Wayne Dyer, the bald headed guy that used to be on PBS and would quote the Lord Jesus, but then he would have quote other wise men and ascended masters.

And it's all good. It's all wisdom. It comes from multiple sources.

If you track and follow any of the leaders and influencers in the progressive church, they quote everybody. They quote all kinds of modern day authors. They'll quote Gregory Boyd, whose book publishing letters between him and his dad, I loved, but Greg Boyd has written several other books that are misleading and destructive.

And I am pained to say it, but people quote Greg Boyd right and left from these books. They will quote Bart Ehrman. They will quote Dallas Willard.

They will quote Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who lost his life in World War II because of being a Christian and being a pastor and a prolific author and so on. Hitler made sure he got executed or Hitler's people did. Now he didn't survive the war in Germany, but this does not confer inspiration on the words of Bonhoeffer or on the words of any of these other people, Mother Teresa or words purported to have been spoken by Mother Teresa or whoever.

But you will find that the landscape is filled with signs and billboards and memes and

tropes and quotations and little signage and billboards on Twitter and Facebook and every place that somebody can publish of quotations of people because as soon as you say that we who become disciples can make other disciples, well now I am going to start assigning authority to what these people who appear to be great disciples are saying. And it is a deceit. It is a trick.

Our witness is not inspired. My words, the Bible classes I present are only inspired to the extent that they reflect the inspired word of God. And the words of people and little quotations are only inspired or inspirational in the genuine sense to the extent that they reflect scriptural truth.

But so many of these, if you don't just read them and emote over them, if you read them and go back to scripture and say, is this in scripture? Is social action and social justice something that the Christian is called to? I find a mysterious lack of a call to social justice, even in the Sermon on the Mount, which is the, this is the Romans nine, what Romans nine is to your Calvinist, Matthew five through seven is to the progressive church. But they have to twist and redefine and manipulate and change righteousness to justice and change this to that and make the Sermon on the Mount, quote unquote, a manifesto for social justice. Blessed are the peacemakers, so we need to all go out and make peace in society.

And this is the danger. It is a slippery slope. And this is why I am emphasizing, I am splitting this hair.

I am making a careful distinction between speaking the truth to one another in love, faithful men teaching biblical truth so that other faithful people can pick up that truth and communicate it. But we have to remember the power is in the truth and in the spirit, not in my communication of it, not in my exemplary living of it. The example that we are to follow is the example of the Lord Jesus and the example of the apostles, Peter and John and Paul primarily.

Remember when Paul says, what you have heard and seen in me, follow? How can he say that? He's a divinely commissioned apostle. I would never in a million years tell you that. Well, look at me and follow my example.

I can't, I am a disciple, I am not an apostle. And as a disciple, as someone who has been commissioned by God to teach, I am one to whom has been entrusted the truth of God. And it is my job as faithfully and as accurately as I can to share that truth, but I do not make disciples.

God's truth and God's spirit makes disciples. What people who receive the truth and receive the spirit do with those gifts of God determines whether or not they become disciples. We determine whether or not we are disciples.

Nobody should come up to you and hand you a cross and say, carry this. Jesus said, unless you take up your cross and follow me, you take up your own cross. You have my words, you keep them.

You are the one who loves me. I and my father will come to you and make our home with you. It's a fine distinction, but it is a critical one.

And by blurring those lines, we have created a subjective Christianity that has eyes on people. Well, I look at you, I think you need to be disciplined. You're not living as you should.

I need to be turning those laser-like beam-filled eyes on myself and get the beams out of my eyes. I might be able to help by speaking truth with moat removal, not beams. The beams, the big problems, we've got to get those done for ourselves.

Jesus said, you can speak the truth to your brother and it may be helpful if he's got a speck. Jesus never said, well, if you speak a lot of truth to him, you can get the beam out of his eye. Who removes beams? God's word and God's spirit gives me the power to get the big logs out of my vision, to get the large obstructions out of my life.

We can help each other with moats, specks. This time of year, if I walk between this house and the one down the hill, there's a place where there's just swarms of these little teenagency bugs. And almost every time I walk, at least one of them gets in my eye.

They seem to be attracted to the darkness that is in my eyes. I don't know, they're trying to swarm into the blackness of my soul. I don't know what they see, but they just make a beeline for my eye.

And sometimes it's helpful if somebody can look in there and say, oh, you've got a bug in your eye. Get a little corner of a Kleenex and get it out. But we all have to remove our own beams.

Where does the power come from? It is the word and the spirit. We become disciples as we follow Christ in that power and in no other way. And to implicate other people is to suddenly begin to appreciate, well, you know, he was such an influence.

He was such a mentor. He was such a this and such a that. All the appreciation in the world, people appreciated that Jesus fed them the loaves and the fishes, but that appreciation went in a wrong and strange direction.

And they ended up trying to make him something he was not intended to be at that time. Here in Acts 14, they are trying to make Paul and Barnabas into something that they tear their clothes. They run out into the crowd and said, don't get your eyes on us.

We are not the issue. It is the word and it is the spirit. That's what you have seen.

It's not us. Don't make an issue out of us. And this is the apostolic witness.

It's the Lord Jesus saying, don't come up here and try to make me king. It's not my time. We are so prone to do this.

We are so easily distracted into subjectivity. And that's why it's important to maintain and to observe and to respect this process. Discipleship is an individual pursuit.

I become a disciple by my decisions, what I do with the truth of God. At the same time, are we a body? You can't read Ephesians without understanding that the whole body is fitly joined together by that which every joint supplies and it grows and edifies itself. Our association, our spiritual gifts minister, and we are edified.

Edification being built up, being encouraged, speaking the truth to one another in love. Psalms, hymns, spiritual songs, singing, making melody in our hearts to the Lord. Not singing and making melody to each other.

Not trying to say, well, you know, I'm an elbow. I'm going to see how many elbows I can make. Well, I'm an earlobe.

I'm going to see how many other earlobes I can make. Who puts the pieces into the body? The body doesn't manufacture more body parts. God makes the body.

Adam formed from the dust of the ground. The new Adam, the body of Christ is formed by God from components that he organizes. He assembles, he, according to his own design, his own purposes, his own symmetry, his own structure, assigns us our place in the body.

And I don't, what happens if you start growing extra body parts, that's called cancer. That's called tissue that the body is generating that's not a part of the design. I'm not saying people trying to do discipleship are creating cancer.

What I am saying is we have to focus on the way God makes disciples. And our edifying of each other through our spiritual gift if you look at the spiritual gifts, any list you want to assemble, none of them is making disciples, none of them. We encourage, we speak the truth, we can minister, we can comfort, we can empathize, we can support in so many ways.

Teaching the truth is one of the primary ingredients by which people become disciples. But teaching the truth doesn't make a disciple. Me communicating the word of God doesn't make a single disciple, never has and never will.

That truth has to land in receptive soil. It has to be received deep. The thorns have to be cleared away.

The stony ground has got to be softened. It's got to sink in before the birds of the air

carry it away. It's all about the soil.

By God's grace, I am a hand that scatters the seed of the word, but I don't make wheat 30-fold, 60-fold, and 100-fold. The soil does that with its reception of that seed. And to remember that model is to focus on our own discipleship.

The only disciple I can make, quote unquote, is me. Just me. And as a disciple, I can be used by God in any number of ways, but I cannot make a single other disciple, any more than an elbow can make another elbow, or a little toe can make another little toe.

The members of the body are created and assigned their function and their place and their opportunity to bless the rest of the body by God himself. It's his truth. It's his spirit.

It is the authority of the Lord Jesus that commissioned the apostolic witness. And that is the truth. We take it one level, from the apostles to disciples, not disciple to disciple to disciple, making a disciple.

We can speak the truth and we can entrust it. And people to whom it is entrusted, what is the single quality that is mentioned? What does Paul tell Timothy is the single essential quality for entrusting truth? Faithful men, faithful men who can teach others. Faithful men, that teaching, that entrusting, that passing on of truth.

Somebody in each generation has to be teaching the truth for it to do its disciple making work. But it is the truth that does the work. I can speak the truth.

I can hand it to you. What you do with it is your business. You're accountable before God.

Jesus says, who are you to judge another man's servant? To his own master, he will stand or fall. If he's been entrusted with a talent, what does he do with it? Or three talents or five? He's accountable to his own master, not to some intermediary. It is the road to Catholicism if you start inserting human beings into the discipleship process.

God the Father, the Lord Jesus, his apostolic witnesses, us. That's the link. Those are the links in the chain.

Don't be sticking any other extra links in there. And I would much, wouldn't you much rather be directly related to God through Christ by the Spirit and the Word than relying on fallible people? I would grieve in my heart if someone else's walk with the Lord depended on me. If it can be influenced by me, it can be influenced by others.

Legalistic Jews can come in and co-opt and subvert your allegiance. If you look at Paul and Barnabas as really great guys, well, here's some other really great guys. Maybe I should listen to them.

Well, here's Bonhoeffer. Maybe I should listen to him. Here's Dallas Willard.

I should listen to him. Well, here's Mother Teresa. I should listen to her.

Here's this guy and that guy and this book and that book and this idea and that idea. And the first thing you know, you're assigning equal weight and the Word of God no longer has its place as the soul-inspired authority for faith and practice. All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth, Jesus said.

His authority designated the apostles. That's where we go to become disciples. Well, I hope this is helpful.

I hope it's clarifying. There's a lot of dust in the air these days about the kingdom and about discipleship. But you look at scripture, it just becomes so crystal clear.

Just think about the feeding of the 5,000, the feeding of the 4,000. Think about Paul and Barnabas shredding their clothes saying, don't look at us. It's the Lord Jesus.

If you go back to John 6, I don't have time to cover it now, but look at what Jesus says. They quote scripture to Jesus. And they say, but why don't you give us this bread always? Because doesn't scripture say in the Psalms, he gave them manna in the wilderness? And you know what Jesus replies? Moses didn't give you the manna.

My father gave you the manna. Jesus says, you're looking at Moses. It wasn't Moses, it was my father.

Get your chain of custody straight. My father gave manna in the wilderness. These details matter.

Closer in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the witness of the word. Thank you for the presence and power of your Holy Spirit to help us to see it and understand it, to internalize it, to make it a part of the treasures both new and old that we have in our soul.

We pray that as we reflect on these truths, the Holy Spirit will shine the light of your word on our path so that we can see clearly how to be more and more effective as disciples, to be a blessing to those in our periphery, to have the full exercise and function of our spiritual gift, which is our opportunity to reflect your presence and your power in this world. We pray it in Jesus' name, amen.