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The Great Hope, Part 3

Luke 9:23-26

And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels."

Clearly, the mission of the church is to disciple one another and disciple others.

Discipleship is this intentional, lifelong process of helping one another learn from Jesus and His teachings so that we might more fully find our life in him, obey him, and become more like him in our natures.

This is the third week of this series on our vision, our mission as a church. As we stated, this mission comes right out of the Great Commission that Jesus gave in Matthew chapter 28, some of his last words to his first followers, his first disciples. He came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me," Jesus said. And then he said to his followers, "Therefore you go and make disciples of all nations, all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and then teaching them to obey everything Jesus commanded of us." And then he said this: he will be with us until the end of the age in this mission.

God wants to walk with us and empower us in this mission, and he does this by sharing his love with us. So we want to love him and then obey him by loving others, primarily by helping them move towards Christ in their lives, pointing them to Jesus, the most important thing we can do here on the earth.

Jesus said, when asked what is the greatest commandment, is return love to God for his gracious, loving kindness to us that he's displayed, and then move on and share that love with one another.

Our discipleship strategy is born out of these two great famous scriptures, the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. We have been describing this strategy as the great hope that we have for people.

And just in quick review, we've talked about the first great hope we have for people is that they will come to know the living, resurrected Christ. We understand in the Christian faith that Jesus walked the earth some 2000 years ago, was crucified for the sins of humanity, and then was resurrected on the third day, ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father and is interceding for us. And he's commissioned us to point others to him that they might have a relationship, personal relationship, with him.

We can say very clearly that all people on the earth matter to God. He's paid a price, the price of his Son, for them to get to be in his presence. Jesus is the antidote to the greatest problem humans face. So we want people to know Jesus.

The answer to our real problems and the depth of our problems here on the earth is not public policy. It's not economics. It's not education. It is not social. It is spiritual in nature, and it is in the heart of human beings. All of the problems we experience this side of eternity are here because of human sin, the sinfulness of the human heart.

The revelation of the Bible is that there is a good God over all creation. He placed human beings on this part of his creation, and we went sour. It's a good God working with bad people in grace and mercy to redeem them and bring them back into his goodness. And all of this comes to a person through Christ. There is no other way. Christ is God's answer to human sinfulness and the brokenness in our hearts, the forgiveness of sins, the ushering in of a new nature. All comes to us through Jesus.

And not only when we come to the living Christ does he forgive our sin, but then he can lift our shame so that we can walk in dignity and be in the presence of God, and have communion and fellowship with him, and then begin to experience life and life eternal. This is the gospel for salvation, the good news for salvation. We also call it the gospel for justification.

We've been talking about this more deeply in our Gospel Essentials class. We want people to know Christ. Then beyond that, we want them to grow in Christ, to mature in a relationship with the living Christ, to help them be prepared for facing eternity, for stepping into eternity with God, to mature along the pathway so they're transformed into the image of Christ, and they're ready to meet him on the day of judgment and then be with him forever.

As we grow in Christ and gaze upon his glory, we are transformed from glory to glory, being prepared for when we step into eternity. This life here is simply a warm up for the new life that God has offered us. We weren't intended to live in sinfulness and under the curse of brokenness and death forever. God has redeemed us and is preparing us, wants to prepare us, for eternity.

And in doing that, he also strengthens us to face the challenges that we face here on the earth. John said Jesus quote in chapter 16, verse 33, "In this world you will have trouble, but take heart." Strength in Jesus, for he has overcome the world. All the pain, all the suffering, all the hurt, God is wanting to eventually help us step out of all of it. Walk through it with strength right now. Greater is he that is in us when we believe than he that is in the world.

Maturing in a relationship with him gives us a spiritual fortitude and tenacity in facing the challenges of this life. And then it even goes further, not only preparing us for eternity, eternity giving us strength in this life, but then invites us into the abundant, meaningful, purposeful life of working with God.

Jesus described that purposeful life this way in John 15. Again, this is a review of where we've come. "I am the vine," Jesus said, "the source of life. You are the branches. If you remain in me."

Mature with him, walk with him, and I in you. You will multiply. You'll bear fruit, fruit that will last. This is to my Father's glory that you bear much fruit. And this is then how we show ourselves to actually be his disciples.

So here we have this beginning of discipleship, a person coming to know Christ, grow in Christ, and start to bear fruit, and then we move on to fruit bearing.

Now there are two kinds of fruit that God mentions in the Scripture for you and I to bear. The first is the inner spiritual fruit of a Christ-like character. These include things that are listed in Galatians chapter five, verse 22. If we walk with Christ and abide with him, the old nature gets crucified. We die to the old nature. The new nature can be strengthened by the Spirit of God. And we begin to walk in the fruits of the Spirit of God.

Internally, we experience and can share real love. We can taste of inexpressible joy. We can walk in a supernatural peace. We can grow in a patience with the challenges of this world. Gentleness. Kindness. Tenderness, self control. This is the new nature that heals the old nature. It supersedes it. And when a person grows in Christ, they start to emulate the fruits of the kingdom of God, what will live in forever.

So we have the internal fruits that should mature and sprout in us as we walk with Christ. And then we have external spiritual fruits that God has given us the capacity to be a part of producing by our words, then how we speak in our new nature, our actions based on faith, our words based on faith, and then our prayers that flow from our faith.

All can plant seeds and help produce spiritual fruit of the eternal kingdom of God in the here and now. We pray for this every week. "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." And what we're really saying is, "Lord, bring it through me," because that's his plan. With patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, the fruit of my words and the fruit of my actions.

Paul described this purpose this way. It supersedes all the other purposes that we have in the world. I am a father. I'm a grandfather. I'm a husband. I have been in ministry as a pastor. I've served in many different ways. My wife and I work in some business. But all those things are temporary works that I'm a part of.

The superseding job of mine over all these things is to be a representative of the eternal kingdom of heaven. As a son of the Most High God, adopted into his family by Jesus, everywhere I go, every place I put my feet, in the gas station, in the grocery store, I am a person called, as every believer is, to be an ambassador, a representative of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Paul said it this way, first Corinthians three: the Lord has assigned to each their task.

And Paul describes a couple tasks here. I planted a seed, a spiritual seed. Paul did this often with his words. Apollos watered it. He came and nurtured it in other people's souls. But God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants or the one who waters is what matters, but only God who makes all things grow.

God is in the world doing this, and he wants to use us to be a part of his service with the fruit inside of us. That is a fruit that comes out in what we say and what we do and what we pray.

This leads to the third part of our great hope, that people will come to know Christ, grow in Christ, and then take on the responsibility, the calling, to help make Christ known in the world, become a discipler of others.

In our lesson today, Paul wrote this: the love of Christ compels us. There comes a point when you're maturing in the love of Christ that you can't help but overflow with what you've come to know and the love you've come to experience. It's welling inside of me. It has to come out, and I have to share it.

The love of Christ compels us because we are convinced Jesus died for all in his sacrificial love so that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for him who died and was raised again.

And then he has committed to us, to us. Notice the communal nature. It's not just the clergy. It's not just the staff. It's not just the evangelists out in the world. It's all of us, the body of Christ, the body of believers. He has committed to us the message of healing, reconciliation, finding our peace with God through Jesus.

We are therefore, it's proactive, Christ's ambassadors assigned by the King to be as representatives of his eternal kingdom here on the earth, to share his interests, his values, his truths with those around us. People who are called to be leaders in ministry, pastors, evangelists, teachers, those things are here to equip the body for these works as a team effort.

And I am so thankful that so many here of Nazareth have taken up their backpack in this era to be salt and light for the world. We are to implore people on Christ's behalf to be reconciled with God. There are many who are enemies, still living as enemies of God because they're not under the blood of Jesus.

Many years ago, I was with a group of people where I was leading devotions for five mornings, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday. And I got to the Wednesday devotion. I was speaking on us being ambassadors. I was speaking on Jesus' words in Matthew chapter five where he said we're the light of the world. We're the salt of the earth. We shouldn't hide the light under a bushel. We shouldn't lose our saltiness.

And three ladies, elderly ladies, called me over after the Wednesday morning devotion, and they pulled me aside and they said to me, "Tim, we don't like your devotions. We don't like them."

I said, "Oh, could I hear a little more?"

They said, "We've all agreed that our faith has always been a very private thing, and we don't think we should be talking about it with others. If you could encourage us more in our faith, but leave us alone, we would appreciate that."

Now, I had two mornings of devotions left, and I had to decide if I was going to try to appease these three ladies or not. It was a challenge inside of me. Should I just take the easy road and go to Isaiah and talk about comfort, my people comfort? Or should I speak to them about the calling in the New Testament for them to be ambassadors for Jesus with their words, with their life, with their prayers, to make Christ known in the world?

It was in that time that these words of our gospel reading came to me, Luke chapter 9:25 and 26, where Jesus said, “Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in glory and the glory of the Father and the holy angels.”

I had to ask myself the question Paul asked himself in Galatians chapter one, where he asked this question: am I trying to win the approval of people or of God? If I'm trying to please people primarily, I probably won't do what God is calling me to do.

We are his ambassadors, friends, and as we represent him, God has guaranteed that we will experience resistance and persecution, but we should delight in that and rejoice in it.

I want to talk just a moment here as we wind down about this in a more personal way, reaching out. Acts chapter one talks about a strategy for doing this. Do it in your city, Jerusalem. Judea, large area, community, state. And then to the ends of the earth. Be making disciples everywhere.

But the most important thing, how we are working to disciple one another right here. But if we look a little farther into our stewardship of the gospel for salvation and sanctification, we know from the scriptures that it is primarily our responsibility to pass it on to the children in our midst, to disciple the generations coming behind us.

So for all you young parents that are here today, thank you for bringing your children to worship, whatever their age. We know it can get a little restless and you can leave if you have to at times, but they experience the community of faith in here. Your actions demonstrate faith by coming to church. What you do with your checkbook demonstrates your priorities and your values to your children.

How you behave in public is a demonstration of your representation of Christ, and children are watching. Most of the love of God is caught, not taught.

So thank you, parents, for prioritizing bringing children in here for us to help nurture and disciple. Then how you speak in our words, the things we say either represent Christ or represent a pull downward.

And then finally, the top three things that influence children for faith: the lives of the adults that are modeled for them, the words that are spoken in what they're taught by the adults in their lives, and then also the emotional bond that children maintain with key adults in their lives. They need to know we care deeply about them and love them and want them to flourish.

If children know all this comes from love, it's very likely they too will become disciples of the Most High God.

Let's pray together.

Father, we thank you for this chance to be in this room together and consider what you've called us to. Now, as we prepare our hearts to come before the communion table, I ask that you would remind us of your great love for us, that we would be grounded and rooted in this love, that you would sink it deep into our souls, and so that love would compel us to continue growing in you, and then being courageous in loving ways to help make you known to those around us.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.