

# The Sending of Disciple-Making Disciples

Sermon preached by Jonathan Huang for Houston Chinese Church  
Sunday, September 25, 2022

## ❖ Introduction

- Back in May, I got the privilege of attending my graduation ceremony for seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. It was a special situation because I got to walk for graduation, but didn't finish my last class until the summer. So I actually got my diploma in the mail later on.
- Now being there with other graduates, I still remember feeling this connection between graduating and the idea of soldiers being deployed. You see, graduation isn't just about getting together to celebrate our academic achievements.
- No, it's about deployment. We're being sent out. We're to take what we've learned and be sent out into the world to serve God in whatever way he's called us.
- This morning, we're continuing on in our sermon series about our church's vision. Here at Houston Chinese Church, we seek to be an urban Chinese-heritage church in central Houston that reaches all those in our lives, Chinese or otherwise, through equipping, *sending*, and planting.
- And it's this idea of *sending* that I want to focus our attention on today.
- Here at HCC, we want to be a sending church.
- We want this church to be a place where people are welcomed in, equipped, and if the time comes for them to leave us, we see it not as a loss, but as an opportunity.
- I think about two good friends at HCC I used to disciple back when they were in college. Both eventually served as leaders of our college cell groups. Now, one's in Seattle, Washington and the other's in New Haven, Connecticut.
- Both serving God in their own ways where God's sent them.
- You see, a sending church is a church of sent people on mission with God wherever they go.
- Jesus says to his disciples in John chapter 20, "As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you" (John 20:21b, ESV).
- If you ask me my opinion for what our church is most known for, I'd say two things: 1) the preaching of God's Word and 2) Christian community.

- But if we're not just aiming to be a church known for its solid teaching and warm community, but also a church that's sending out disciple-making disciples, we've really got to ask: *how are we going to get there?*
- Because if you're anything like me, your life is super busy. And you've got all sorts of things on your plate. Your to-do list is never ending. And your priorities can easily get misaligned.
- It was just the other day when my wife and I were supposed to have a date over lunch at home. But instead of going downstairs as soon as possible, I was in my room on the phone with Apple support staff trying to get help for something I really could have gotten help for another time.
- My priorities were misaligned.
- So here we are. A church full of busy people, with all sorts of different priorities.
- And we want to become a sending church.
- When it's easy to get things misaligned, what's it going to take as a church to get ourselves *realigned* with God's mission in this world?
- So that's what I want us to think about today. If you have your Bibles, I want you to turn with me to a familiar passage to Matthew 28:18-20.
- This passage takes place at the end of Matthew's account of Jesus' life. Jesus' mission on earth of living the life we sinners should have lived and dying the death we should have died has culminated in him being raised back to life in a miraculous way.
- And after his resurrection, Jesus gives his disciples what's known as the Great Commission. I'm going to focus on verses 18-20, but let's read together starting from verse 16 for context.
  - "Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. <sup>17</sup> And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. <sup>18</sup> And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:16-20, ESV).
- Life's busy. It's easy to misalign our priorities. I get it. It can happen individually, but also as a church. So if we really want to become a sending church, what do we need to do to get ourselves realigned with God's mission in this world?
- Well here in this passage, I see three things.

❖ **First, to become a sending church, we've got to realign ourselves with Jesus' power.**

- And by power here, I'm really talking about power in the sense of authority. Jesus is with his disciples in Galilee. He's about to leave them and send them out on mission.
- But notice the very first thing Jesus says: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matt. 28:18, ESV).
- Now you might be wondering, who's giving Jesus authority here? In Philippians chapter 2, we see that it's God the Father who's giving Jesus this authority. It's the Father who exalts the Son and gives him "the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:9-11, ESV).
- And so Jesus, right now, in the present, has supreme authority over all creation. And Christians are ambassadors sent out to announce Jesus' rightful authority and kingship to the world, calling everyone to repent and to be reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:18-20).
- No lesser authority on earth—no government, no city council, no school board—should make us shrink back from the commission Jesus has given us to preach the gospel and to make disciples.
- In the book of Acts, as the early church was being formed, the religious authorities arrest the apostles Peter and John. They order Peter and John "not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus" (Acts 4:18, ESV). They were trying to stop this gospel movement in its tracks.
- And so how do Peter and John respond? They say this. "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:19-20, ESV).
- The other believers hear about what the authorities have to say, and immediately we see them pleading with God through prayer for "boldness" so that they could keep preaching the Word despite persecution (Acts 4:23-31, ESV).
- I think we're facing a similar situation today. The religious authorities tried to silence the apostles in much the same way the society around us would want to silence our witness in the world today. "Don't talk about your religion with me." "You believe what you want. I believe what I want."
- Oh how Satan would *so* want to keep our mouths shut and hold us back from speaking the truth about God and the truth about ourselves.
- *But we can't do that!*

- Jesus is the rightful king over heaven and earth. The gospel tells us that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23, ESV).
- That “the wages of sin is death,” eternal death (Rom. 6:23, ESV).
- That “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins” (Heb. 9:22, ESV).
- So someone has to pay for the price of our sins. It’s either us in eternal hell...or Jesus on the cross.
- To remain silent is not an option!
- If we want to be disciple-making disciples, if we want to see our church become a sending church, then, friends, we’ve got to pray for boldness consistent with the fact that Jesus has ultimate authority over *everything* in this world.
- We need boldness because it’s easy to shrink back from having spiritual conversations with people in a culture that sees religion as suspect. In a society that wants to keep Bible-believing people silent.
- Pray for boldness and against the fear of man. And realign yourself with Jesus’ power, his authority.
- We’re going to need this boldness if we want to be disciple-making disciples realigned with God’s mission in this world.

❖ **Second, in order to become a sending church, we must realign ourselves with Jesus’ priorities.**

- Jesus first makes clear that he’s in charge, he has ultimate authority in this world. But then he immediately goes onto the meat of what he’s trying to get at. Look down at verse 19 with me.
- “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19-20a, ESV).
- One commentator explains that the way this sentence is put together, we should read the main imperative here as “make disciples,” which is carried out by the other two participles, “baptizing” and “teaching.”<sup>1</sup>
- Jesus has two priorities when it comes to making disciples: evangelism and discipleship.

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<sup>1</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 1115.

- Here's a confession. I used to think that I was ok just focusing on discipling Christians and leadership development because that's what I thought I was good at. That's what I got excited about.
- But I didn't really give much time and energy to evangelism. And worse yet, I didn't think there was a problem with that.
- But the reality is that the Great Commission is about the priorities of *both* evangelism *and* discipleship. After all, making disciples starts with baptizing people into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
- Which means someone had to have explained to someone outside the faith what it means to become a Christian. And this non-Christian had to, at some point, *become* a Christian through faith in the gospel. And all that needs to take place *before* baptism into the life of a local church.
- So the priority of evangelism is baked into the idea of making disciples. There's no way around it.
- But here's my question: if evangelism is so important, why aren't we doing more of it?
- Here's my answer. One of the biggest things I think you need to look at when it comes to making disciples, and particularly evangelism if you're not wired that way, is spelled with four letters.
- You know what it is? T-I-M-E. Time.
- I know you're super busy. I know you've got all sorts of priorities swirling around in your mind.
- But if you want to be realigned with Jesus' priorities, you have to carve out *time* to be on mission with God.
- I love the story that one of my seminary professors tells.<sup>2</sup> He talks about how some churches have so many activities on their calendars that members don't have much time left over to be around people outside the church.
- So there was this pastor who decided to make a drastic change for the sake of the mission.
- For one whole year, there were only going to be meetings held at the church building two days a week. Members were encouraged to set aside one night a week to engage people outside the Christian faith and move towards gospel conversations with them.

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<sup>2</sup> Timothy K. Beougher, *Invitation to Evangelism: Sharing the Gospel with Compassion and Conviction* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2021), 318.

- And after that one year, this church experienced the largest number of converts to the Christian faith it ever had. And my professor suggests, “Perhaps it was because the church calendar changed to allow time for building relationships with those outside the church!”<sup>3</sup>
- Let’s be honest. It’s easy to get caught up building relationships with one another *inside* the church. But we’ve only got so much time. Something’s got to give. So here’s my invitation.
- Some of you here today just need to start with prayer. Who are three people far from God in your life you can commit to praying for every day?
- Make it a regular prayer of yours to ask that God would use you to help bring at least one more person to faith in Christ by the end of this year. Pray that every year. It’s a simple prayer. But if you keep praying that over and over again, it’ll keep the priority of evangelism in the front of your mind.
- For some of you, maybe your next step is to build evangelism into your regular rhythms. Block out a time into your calendar, once a week or every other week, just to be with people who are far from God. Maybe it’s a Wednesday night or Saturday afternoon.
- You don’t have to be legalistic about it. But the principle is to just make sure you’re carving out intentional time to be with people outside the Christian faith on a regular basis.
- So that’s evangelism. Now discipleship is really more of an umbrella term that’s encapsulated in the Great Commission idea of “teaching [people] to observe all that [Jesus has] commanded” us (Matt. 28:20a, ESV).
- Once you’re a Christian, your discipleship to Christ can be cultivated in a lot of different ways: being fed the Word of God on a Sunday morning like this, being a part of a small group, reading a good book about the Christian life, and so on.
- But one of the best ways I know to grow as a disciple is 1-on-1, personal discipling. Think of it like having a personal trainer for your spiritual life.
- You can start a workout plan by reading some stuff online and hitting the gym on your own. But how much more effective would your workout plan be if you had a personal trainer walking alongside you in the process, coaching you towards your goals?
- The same is true for spiritual growth.

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<sup>3</sup> Beougher, *Invitation to Evangelism*.

- There's a difference between *discipling* and *discipleship*. Mark Dever defines discipling as “deliberately doing spiritual good to someone so that he or she will be more like Christ.”<sup>4</sup>
- He says that discipleship is the idea of “our own following Christ,” while discipling is the idea of “helping someone else follow Christ.”<sup>5</sup>
- I've known Pastor Jason since I was in high school. He was our Youth Director back in the day and I was in his discipleship group. I still remember how I struggled with my appearance because I had a lot of pimples.
- And I remember how he took me aside one day and encouraged me to have “Christ-esteem” instead of self-esteem.
- That simple conversation, I still remember to this day.
- Soon after Jason came back to HCC to serve as an English Minister at our church a little over 10 years ago, I began meeting up with Jason as my personal discipler. And it's through this discipling relationship that I feel I've been deeply shaped into who I am today theologically and even vocationally.
- Some of you know this already, but I recently made a major transition from working as a physician to being on staff here at HCC as a Church Planting Resident. I'm still planning on working on the side a little as a doctor, but most of my time will be going into helping see a new church started out on the west side of town.
- And I imagine that my life as a pastor is going to be shaped, in different ways, by the example and influence of my discipler, by Pastor Jason. I say all this to illustrate the impact that *discipling* has had on my *discipleship*.
- If we want to be a sending church that's about making disciple-making disciples, then you've got to ask yourself, who's discipling you? And who are you discipling?
- I've heard it said in these terms. Who's your Paul? And who's your Timothy? If these people aren't in place in your life, I want to invite you to start looking for people to disciple and to be disciplined by here at HCC.
- As a church, we're on the cusp of a major building campaign. I want to say that I think buildings facilitate the mission—this building campaign is not the mission in and of itself.

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<sup>4</sup> Mark Dever, *Discipling: How to Help Others Follow Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 13.

<sup>5</sup> Dever, *Discipling: How to Help Others Follow Jesus*.

- But if we want to be a sending church that makes disciple-making disciples, then it makes sense to do what we can to remodel and renovate and expand our building in a way that helps our church facilities become the training center and sending base that we want them to be.
- So we've got this Great Commission. I'm calling us to realign ourselves with Jesus' power. To realign ourselves with Jesus' priorities of making disciples through evangelism *and* discipleship. But there's one more thing I see here if we want to become a sending church.

❖ **To become a sending church, we've got to realign ourselves with Jesus' promise.**

- Look down at the second part of verse 20 with me. Jesus says this: "And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20b, ESV).
- The journey of making disciples won't be an easy one. You're going to face the fear of rejection, the fear of losing friendships, the fear of losing your reputation among your friends, your co-workers, your classmates.
- When you start opening your mouth to talk about Jesus, not everyone's going to like it. And it may sting when you do face rejection or feel like people think differently about you because you tried to bring up spiritual conversations.
- But that's why Jesus' promise to be with us can be so comforting.
- I still remember when a non-believing friend of mine texted me about wanting to hold off doing more Bible studies. We had just finished our second time getting together to study about the Christian faith. But at this point, it didn't seem like he was interested anymore.
- It's hard not to feel sad or disappointed when that happens.
- But you know, nobody ever said that making disciples was going to be easy.
- But Jesus does say, you won't do it alone. *I'm giving you my Spirit. And wherever I send you, I'll be with you. Keep on going. I'll be with you.*
- In Acts 18, when Paul was in Corinth, Scripture says that "he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks" about Christ (Acts 18:4, ESV). But there were people who were totally against him, who rejected him for preaching the gospel.
- Then there was this one night that Jesus says to Paul in a vision, "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people" (Acts 18:9-10, ESV).



- So church, disciple-making may not be easy. But you're not doing it alone. Realign yourself with Jesus' promise and remember that he will be with you to the end of the age.
- There's comfort here in this promise, but there's also a call. It's a call to urgency. A call to fight with all our hearts against the paralyzing poison of complacency. Jesus says that he'll be with us—to the end of the age. Which means there *will* be an end to this age.
- And at the end of this age, there will be a final judgment where those in Christ will enter into eternal glory and those outside of Christ will enter into eternal hell.
- Which means that it won't be always like this where we have the opportunity to share the gospel and people outside the faith have the opportunity to turn to Christ.
- There's a kind of mercy in Jesus not coming back just yet. This means there's still time for sinners to repent, for the lost to be saved. What I'm trying to get you to feel, if you're Christian here today, is a deep sense of *urgency* to get the gospel to as many people as we can as *soon* as we can.
- Now I want to speak to those of you here who don't identify as a Christian. First of all, we're glad you're here. Thank you so much taking the time to be in a worship gathering like this.
- I hope you see from our time in the Bible together why Christians are the way they are. We feel this urgency to tell you the truth about God and the truth about humans because we really think we've got good news in our hands.
- And no news is really good news unless you start with the bad news. The bad news is that every single person in this world is born estranged from God. We're estranged because we're sinners. You might think that God is loving, which he is. But he's also infinitely holy.
- And because he's holy, he's got to hold sinners accountable, which means *someone* has to pay the price for sins committed against God. Try as we may, none of us can wiggle ourselves out of the consequences of sin and get right with God on our own.
- All of us, by default, are headed for an eternity in hell.
- The good news is this: God paved a way to make us right with him again. And it had nothing to do with us. It had everything to do with his Son, Jesus Christ, coming to earth as the God-man, living out the perfect life we couldn't live, and dying a death we should have died.

- The Bible says that without blood being shed, “there is no forgiveness of sins” (Heb. 9:22b, ESV). And that’s exactly what Jesus did for his people. He shed his blood so that if you repent of your sins and turn to Jesus as your Savior, you’ll be forgiven of your sins—past, present, and future. You’ll be made right with God again and given a place in his family.
- What’s more, Jesus isn’t dead. God raised him back to life. And so to be a Christian is to surrender your life completely to a living King Jesus.
- Time is limited. This life is your one chance to turn to Christ. And you can’t assume you can put this off because you’ve got a long life to live. When the end of the age comes or your time comes to leave this earth, you won’t have another chance after death.
- So turn away from your sin. Surrender your life to Jesus *today*.
- Church, there’s no time to waste. If we want to become a sending church, we’ve got to fight against the complacency that cripples our witness.
- And we’ve got to fight against the urge to shrink back because of our fears.
- So let’s rest in the fact that we’re not doing this alone. Jesus promises to be with us as we make disciples of all nations. But ask God to put in all of us a greater sense of urgency to get the gospel to as many people as we can, knowing the end of the age will come.

## ❖ Conclusion

- I hope that whether your time left here at HCC is another year, or another 5 years, or however long God would have you with us, that you can look back on these years at our church as a time when you were discipled to be more like Christ. And when you experienced the joy of helping others follow Christ.
- So to that end, let’s realign ourselves with Jesus’ power, his priorities, and his promise so that we would be a church that sends out disciple-making disciples for the glory of God.