



GATHERED

The Empowered Presence of God's People

TEACHER NOTES & DISCUSSION GUIDE

SESSION ELEVEN: The Mission of the Church

A Study on the Church by



SMYRNAFIRST
BAPTIST CHURCH



Session Eleven

The Mission of the Church

Introduction

The mission of the church has long been debated. Of course, just as everything else in the church is hard bought, even our very purpose gets cloudy in our minds. Throughout the ages, every form of human enterprise has been hoisted upon the church as her mission. Conquest, environmentalism, social justice, health care, relief, social services, liberation have all been argued to be the mission of the church. **In our own day and in our own culture, the mission of the church is understood in two primary ways. First, it is seen as some kind of moral curator, keeping relics of moral standards in pristine condition so that the world can enjoy them. Second, it is seen as a self-help organization whose goal is to help people achieve their best selves.**

The problem with these two perspectives is that they distort the picture of the church by emphasizing small parts of the church to a place of primary importance. These views elevate obedience and human fulfillment as the primary mission of the church. The problem with this is that it becomes satanic pretty quick. When we emphasize obedience, we end up legalists and nationalists and begin to impose upon others our own standards of right and wrong both in the church and through our nations. When we emphasize human fulfillment, we become narcissists and hedonists who will give up everything on the alter of our own desires.

These goals end up pleasing no one; not the world, not us, and certainly not God. The world recognizes when it's being held to a standard that not even the church can follow and so we are labeled hypocrites. The world recognizes when it's being sold snake-oil to line the pockets of religious leaders and so we are labeled hucksters. We feel the emptiness of the pursuit of perfection and riches. God sees a wayward people who have lost their first love.

In order to bring God glory, the church must focus its mission on the person of Jesus Christ and remember that we are first and foremost an outpost of God's kingdom. We are not the agents of change in the world. We are changed agents. We are not the purveyors of prosperity. We are heirs of the King. As such, we should understand that our sole responsibility is not make a moral world or a prosperous world, but to make Jesus Christ known. We are witnesses and truth-tellers who only speak of one person - Jesus Christ. For only in Christ does the world find redemption from sin, perfect righteousness, healing from disease, freedom from oppression, satisfaction of our needs, and eternal happiness.

I. Produce Followers

A. The great commission is still our primary mission.

1. **Matthew 28:19-20** "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."
2. The primary command here is to make disciples.
 - a) A disciple is someone who follows.
 - b) Kevin Vanhoozer makes this helpful observation about the nature of being a disciple.
 - c) "A convert is one who has repented of the past, turns around, and faces the future with faith in Jesus. A disciple is one who does not simply face a new

direction but begins to walk in it. *A disciple is a convert in motion, on the way.*¹
(emphasis mine)

3. The mission then is to make disciples of Jesus Christ.
 - a) The mission statement of Smyrna First begins by stating “We glorify God by making authentic disciples of Jesus Christ...”
 - b) We have qualified the word disciple with a descriptor - authentic.
 - (1) Why? Because being a disciple of Jesus means very little in our culture and we hope reclaim the power of the name by being faithful to who Christ is and what he requires of his people.
 - (2) It is why we are laboring to define biblical ecclesiology in our fellowship. We want to be faithful followers - true disciples.
4. Making disciples includes at least three elements: Evangelism, Baptism, and Teaching.
 - a) Evangelism - telling the gospel and calling people to repentance.
 - (1) When you hear our pastors speak about being “gospel-centered”, it is bigger than merely sharing the gospel, but it is certainly not less than that.
 - (2) We must begin with evangelism.
 - b) Baptism - bringing converts into fellowship with Christ through the local church.
 - (1) Union with Christ is one of the greatest doctrines in the Bible. Our celebration of this magnificent reality for believers is the ordinance of baptism.
 - (2) Without baptism, there is no celebration of new birth; no sign of conversion.
 - c) Teaching - helping people renew their minds so that they can rightly worship.
 - (1) **Matthew 28** instructs us to teach these new disciples to obey all the commands of Jesus.
 - (2) This is explicitly about teaching the Bible.
 - (3) Therefore, we cannot claim to be making disciples unless we are intentionally sitting down with another person and instructing them from the Scripture.
5. This means our ministries should always be designed and programmed with discipleship in mind.
 - a) Too many times, discipleship is labeled a separate ministry of the church when in fact IS the ministry of the church.
 - b) Everything we do should have as its aim the making of disciples.
- B. Discipleship is about building up the body of Christ.
 1. We know Arnold Schwarzenegger as a famous actor and politician, but in 1970 he was known simply as Mr. Olympia, the highest title for professional body builders. To this date, he is the youngest person to ever hold the title and he won it a total of 7 times. He has a body just like the rest of us. What made him Mr. Olympia? Training, dedication, singular focus.
 2. **Ephesians 4:11-12** “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for *building up the body of Christ*.”
 3. This requires the church to have a similar focus and vision, even a regimen.
 4. We cannot simply coast through life without discipline, standards, and intentionality and expect that we will become what Christ has ordained for us to be.
 5. Therefore, we must take the mission of disciple-making seriously.

¹ Vanhoozer, Kevin “Hearers & Doers: A Pastor’s Guide to Making Disciples Through Scripture and Doctrine” p. xxiv-xxv



II. Perform Mercy

- A. As we make disciples, our posture toward the world should be one of mercy.
1. We should be merciful because we are all sinners.
 - a) **James 2:12-13** “So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.”
 - b) Christ came to identify with sinners (**Hebrews 4:15** “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.”)
 - (1) **John 3:17** “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.”
 - (2) Jesus comes to identify with us in our weakness and then to transform us into his perfect strength.
 - (3) Therefore we should identify with all humanity in our weakness - no place for pride.
 2. We should be merciful because we have an inheritance.
 - a) The Giving Pledge is a coalition of the ultra-wealthy, around 200 members, who have committed to giving the majority of their wealth to benefit the world.
 - b) How much more confidence can the church have in our giving?
 - c) **Ephesians 1:11-14** “In him we have obtained an **inheritance**, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is **the guarantee of our inheritance** until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.
 - d) Earlier in the chapter, Paul writes that we have been adopted into God’s family and will receive all the benefit of that relationship.
 3. We should be merciful because we have been shown mercy.
 - a) **Matthew 18:21-35** tells the story of a servant who, though forgiven a great debt, refuses to forgive the smaller debt of another.
 - b) Jesus tells this parable to illustrate our debt to grace.
 - c) Similarly, **Matthew 5:7** “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.”
 - (1) These verses illustrate that our posture should always be one of mercy because by being merciful, we demonstrate that we are children of the merciful King, and because of this, we will feel the mercy of God on us.
 - (2) This is not mercy merited purely by human action, but mercy done by redeemed people.
 4. Mercy is shown both inside the church and outside the church.
 - a) Inside the church, we meet each others needs as they did in the 1st century church.
 - (1) They gave of all they had so that no one had need. (**Acts 4:34**)
 - (2) We minister to the least of these so that one person doesn’t have to carry the burden alone, but we bear it together.
 - b) Outside the church, we show mercy to the least of these.
 - (1) We meet the needs of the hungry and homeless.
 - (2) We stand up for those who are oppressed.
 - (3) We seek justice for those who are wounded.
 - (a) But we do this as an act of mercy driven by the truth of the kingdom.
 - (b) What we do in mercy is a preview of the mercy of the kingdom.
 - i) The wicked will be brought to justice.

- ii) Every wrong will be made right.
- iii) Every need will be met.
- iv) But ONLY for those who fear and love the Lord.
- v) So our message cannot be solely social or physical.
- vi) It must be a message of repentance.

III. Persevere in Suffering

- A. Finally, we must accomplish this mission through suffering.
 - 1. **2 Timothy 3:12** “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,”
 - 2. **Romans 8:36** “As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”
 - 3. Our lives are forfeit for Christ. We give up all we have for the sake of others.
 - a) This is why it is so inconsistent for Christianity to be adversarial in our treatment of others.
 - b) We are to lay our lives down for those who do not yet believe in Christ, just as he laid his life down for us when we were yet sinners.
 - 4. In World War II, the Allies stepped into the chaos and pain of war in order to stop the forces of evil that threatened all people. It was a war that caused unbelievable loss and suffering to untold thousands and hundreds of thousands, but it was a price we were willing to pay because we knew there was a peace to be gained through it if we persevered.
 - a) Christ always leads us in victory (**2 Corinthians 2:14**).

Conclusion

The mission of the church is clear. We cannot lose sight of what God has commanded for us.

Since we follow Jesus Christ, we must obey him by making disciples.

Since we have been shown great mercy, we must show great mercy in turn.

Since we have hope in the world, we must embrace suffering as a way of life.



Session Eleven

Discussion Guide

USE AS MUCH OR AS LITTLE OF THIS DISCUSSION GUIDE AS YOU LIKE.

Introduction

Let's make a short list of things included in the mission of the church. Once list is complete prioritize your order from most to least important.

Is the mission of the church only one thing? Can we know for certain what the mission of the church is?

I. Produce Followers

Pastor Adam says in the lesson that we cannot make disciples unless we are sitting down with someone around the Bible, teaching them to observe all that Jesus commands. In light of Matthew 28:19-20, why would he say it this way?

What fruit of discipleship is evident in our church today? What are we lacking?

What can I do differently to be a more effective disciple-maker?

How does evangelism and missions work together with discipleship?

II. Perform Mercy

What expressions of mercy is our church good at demonstrating?

What expressions of mercy is our church lacking in?

Is there a difference in "doing mercy" and "being merciful"? Does one of these expressions help us be more active in mercy than the other?

How does the inheritance mentioned in Ephesians 1 help us be more generous?

What things in my life make me less merciful? Are there circumstances or certain people to which I feel less inclined to mercy? How do I combat this in my heart?

III. Persevere in Suffering

What kinds of suffering is common to us? What kinds of suffering are rare? Why?

Describe what it looks like practically to embrace suffering in our lives.

How does the knowledge that Christ always leads us in victory and that the gates of hell will not prevail over the church help us in suffering?

Why does suffering strengthen the church?