

Sunday, June 28, 2026 - PM Service - Jesse Diaz
Overcoming Individualism - Part 1
Compassion Over Comfort

In one of my bible college courses that I took this past year, we were discussing the current state of our North-American culture. Specifically, we were discussing some of the common “ism’s” (as my professor called it) that are found within our culture - things like consumerism, individualism, post-modernism, nihilism, nationalism, and so on. We took some time to learn about each one, and after we had gone through all of them, my prof asked us which of these “ism’s” was most threatening to the North American church in our opinion. Now, I think you could definitely make a case for a few of these things, but the one that seemed to grab my attention then, and has continued to do so since, was individualism.

We find ourselves living within a society that promotes and even **urges** us to focus on ourselves above all else. The self is number one, the self must be considered and pampered before others, the happiness of the self is first and foremost, the success of the self is of utmost importance. I’m sure the way this plays out looks different in different people’s lives, and to be honest there are just so many examples that I don’t have time to come up with an exhaustive list, but I’m sure you’ve experienced this in one capacity or another.

I think in all of this, we would be foolish as the body of Christ to not stop every once in a while to not only consider the culture around us and the things going on within it, but to also consider how the culture has influenced us within the church. Unfortunately, we are not always immune to the culture around us like we may hope to be, and if we aren’t careful, these unwanted and un-biblical things can creep in the back door of the church and of our lives without us noticing. And so, as a result, throughout my teaching time in the summer, I am hoping to shine a bit of light on some of the ways that individualism can creep into the church, into our lives, and hopefully point us to some passages that may help in this battle. And this evening, I thought I would start by discussing the relationship between individualism and our outward witness as Christians.

PRAY

I wanted to ground this teaching for tonight in Matthew 9, but before we get there, I thought I would start with a reminder about what our purpose is in this world as Christians. I’m sure many of you are familiar with what we know as the Great Commission, which are Jesus’ very last words in the book of Matthew. Matthew 28:18-20 says “And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth

has been given to me. ¹⁹ 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, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

There is so much to unpack in these verses. But for tonight’s sake, I want to point out two clear things in these verses about our mission as Christians. First, Jesus’ command (not suggestion, command) for us as Christians begins in verse 19 with the word “GO.” It’s an action word, not a passive one. We must first go, and then the “making disciples” part comes once we have gone. Disciples will not be made unless Christians first obey this command to “go.” A lot hinges on this small word.

Now, we need to be careful in our mental approach to this word, about how we interpret this word “go.” Some people when they read these verses tend to lean towards the idea that it’s the “making disciples” which is the real important part of the verse, so therefore they assume we can then ignore the going and instead just share our faith wherever we are in whatever situations we happen to stumble upon. Other people tend to make too much of this word “go” in their own heads when they wrongly assume that this verse is only addressing those who are called to overseas missions. These people tend to wrongly assume that overseas missions are of **greater** value than the call to make disciples within the context that they live in. True, making disciples of ALL nations requires some people to leave and go overseas, but Jesus’ focus in the Great Commission is mainly fixed on the task of all believers to do so wherever they are. (Heard from Amar)

So this going involves more than merely waiting for an opportunity to fall in our laps to share the gospel, but it doesn’t necessarily involve going overseas. It means that we actively pursue opportunities to share the gospel with those in our lives. It involves intentional action, a focused mission, and a heart geared towards others. It means that we don’t just passively sit back and hope that someone eventually asks us to tell them about Jesus - it means that when we go about our lives within the world we look with our eyes and observe and ask for the Holy Spirit to show us opportunities to do so.

I said there were two things I wanted to pull out from the Great Commission - the second one is that Jesus reassures us of His presence. It’s found in the very last sentence in this passage where Jesus says in verse 20 “And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” This is a comforting sentence for sure, but it’s not only supposed to be a warm, fuzzy sentence that makes us feel good. The reassurance of Jesus’ presence with us comes with a purpose here given the context. The promise of His presence is not a feel good thing, but rather His equipping for our mission. Jesus

promises to be with us here for the purpose of spreading the gospel. He promises to play an active role as we seek the lost and bring the message of life. I think it's a common experience for Christians to hesitate sharing the gospel with those around them because they feel they don't have the skill, or the gifting, or the adequate words, or the abilities to do so in an impactful way. Jesus addresses that here - He says "no no no don't worry about what you've got, I promise to be with you." Relying on the presence of our Lord and His guidance and His strength is in of itself a call to step out of individualistic thinking. It's saying "I can't do this on my own, I can't do it without the leading and equipping of the Holy Spirit. I need you."

The Great Commission is not a suggestion, it's not an "if you have time, do this" type thing, it is the command of our Lord before he ascended to heaven. This command attacks any sort of individualism within our hearts. It forces us to think about others, to step outside our comfort zones, and to rely on Jesus rather than ourselves. Our purpose is rooted in this anti-individualistic worldview and mission. But my question tonight is how? This is a lot easier said from up here on the stage than done out in the real world. How do we as Christians come to a place where individualism has no hold on us when it comes to spreading the gospel?

I think the answer can be found in Matthew 9:35-38 where Jesus exemplifies what it means to live a life that is FOR others. It says "And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. ³⁶When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; ³⁸therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

I have three thoughts to share with you regarding these verses, and I am going to jump around within these verses a bit. First, I would like to start with the final two verses in this passage, and in particular I am drawn to Jesus' command here to pray. Matthew 9:37-38 - "Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; ³⁸therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." Immediately we see the reason for the Great Commission in our world. The harvest is plentiful. There are so many unreached people in our world, so many people who need someone to come alongside them with the love of Jesus and walk with them, so many people who need healing (physically, mentally, emotionally), and we serve a God who doesn't wish that **any** should perish. The harvest was plentiful back then and it is plentiful right now.

And although the harvest is plentiful, Jesus says the labourers are few. Notice first that when Jesus says “labourers,” He is suggesting that other beings are to carry out this mission of spreading the gospel (it goes beyond his own ministry time here on earth), and specifically, he is referring to people, to Christians, here as the labourers. We are the ones who are to carry this out in our world.

“The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few.” Because of this we as Christians are supposed to pray about it. We are to pray for God to raise up more believers to go into the world and boldly show and proclaim the love of Jesus to the world. We are to pray for the salvation of those that have been placed into our lives. We are to pray for God to open up **our** eyes to opportunities in our own lives where we could be discipling others. Our prayers should reflect hearts that **long for** the world around us to find the same light and hope and love and grace that we have found.

One of the ways individualism can show itself in our lives is actually in our prayer time with God. It should cause us to pause for a bit when our prayer time never reaches beyond the borders of our own lives. Obviously we all go through different seasons, and there will be times, especially through trials, where our prayers will reflect that. But there should be regular time in our prayer life that is dedicated towards others, dedicated towards the spread of the gospel, dedicated to the harvest. Being used as a labourer in that harvest starts in our times of prayer, and as a result, it addresses those individualistic tendencies that may arise in our hearts.

Second, we are to follow the example of Jesus’ “going.” Matthew 9:35 says “And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction.” Although verse 35 may be the first sentence under a new heading in your Bible, it is actually a summary statement of the things that have just happened earlier in chapter 9. Jesus has just answered a question that the disciples asked about fasting, He brought a girl back from the dead, He healed two blind men, and then He healed a man that was unable to speak. He does all of this (1) because he cares about these individual people (we’ll talk about that in a minute), but (2) Jesus is just about to send out the disciples on a mission of their own, and so he is modelling what it means to go into the world.

Throughout Jesus’ ministry here on earth, he is constantly on the move. Verse 35 says that he “went throughout all the cities and villages.” He didn’t stay in one place. He intentionally went to where the people were. He placed himself among people who needed Him. He didn’t wait for them to all come and flock to Him - they did that as word got around - but we first see **Jesus** stepping into these different places. He met them where they were at: in their towns, in their villages, in their synagogues. Verse 36 starts

off by saying “When he saw the crowds...” and then it goes on to tell us Jesus’ beautiful response to the crowds, but before he can respond to the crowd and perform these miracles and bring healing, he first makes the choice to go.

An individualistic mindset tells us to worry about our schedules and comfort first. It tells us that we should spend all of our time with people who are like-minded (who are just like us), and who we know and enjoy being around. Jesus demonstrates something very different. He intentionally steps into new places, into unfamiliar territory. He makes time to put himself in places where His love can shine through the darkness.

So what does it look like to go in your life right now? What does it look like to follow after the example of Jesus and to seek out those in your life who need to hear the truth? What does it look like to step outside of your comfort zone? What does it look like to be intentional with the people that you rub shoulders with Monday through Friday? I suspect that for many, this call to go is simply that - to ask God to open our eyes to the opportunities that we have right now to bring the gospel to people who are already there in our lives.

Lastly, I wanted to end by taking a look at Jesus’ compassionate heart towards others in verse 36. It says “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” I am constantly moved by the compassionate heart of Jesus throughout his time here on earth. He cared for the needs of individual people amongst crowds, he had a heart for people who were considered outcasts in society, his heart was moved when he saw people who were upset and weeping, he took time to teach his disciples and he was patient with them - Jesus had an undeniable heart for people.

He saw that they were “harrassed and helpless,” which literally means “torn and thrown down,” and he had compassion for them. We are given an image of sheep without a shepherd. Maybe we don’t think of sheep and shepherds very much these days, but it means Jesus saw them as vulnerable, with no protection, subject to how others treated them, unable to rescue themselves. Jesus draws on a familiar image of sheep without a shepherd that is used in several other places in the Bible.

In Numbers 27:16-17, Moses is speaking to the Lord and requesting that God appoints a new leader for Israel once his time is up. He says “Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation ¹⁷ who shall go out before them and come in before them, who shall lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the LORD may not be as sheep that have no shepherd.” In 1 Kings 22:17, Micaiah the

prophet sees a vision: “And he said, “I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd.”

People without the hope of the gospel and without a relationship with Jesus are pictured as sheep without a shepherd. Before accepting Jesus into our lives, that was all of us too. But there is hope for these lost sheep. John 10:7-11 “So Jesus again said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. ⁸ All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹ I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. ¹¹ I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”

The lens that we look at the world through matters. How we see other people who are different from us matters. The type of heart that we approach others with matters. Jesus approached people from the lens of seeing sheep without a shepherd - not in a condescending way, but in a compassionate way. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines compassion as “sympathetic consciousness of others' distress together with a desire to alleviate it.” The Cambridge dictionary describes it as “a strong feeling of sympathy and sadness for the suffering or bad luck of others and a wish to help them.” A compassionate person notices the needs and hurts and pain of others, and is moved to step in and help.

How do you see other people in our world? What sort of feelings and emotions and thoughts build up inside of you when you observe different groups of people? Do you look at the outside world with the same compassion that Jesus did? After all, it was that **compassion** that actually moved him to step in and help.

Do you look with compassion on those who may struggle with a different type of sin than you do, or are you too busy comparing yourself to them? Do you look with compassion on people from other religions, or are you only focused on trying to win an argument? Are you moved with compassion on those who are homeless and in poverty, or do you just think “eh, they must have done it to themselves”? Do you look with compassion on people of different ethnic backgrounds, or do you let cultural divisions harden your heart? Do you look with compassion on the needs of those who align differently politically than you do, or do you write them off as soon as you find out they're on the other side? Let's be honest, it's June, do you look compassionately on those celebrating Pride month, or does your hate for the sin taint your view of the person in a way it wasn't meant to?

Church, compassion and conviction are not mutually exclusive - they can (and should) co-exist. You can be 100% rock solid in your beliefs and still have compassion towards people who are different. You can be firm in the Bible and still engage with those who have never read a word of it. We are called to be both: we are called to be rooted in the Word and firm in our convictions, while also deeply compassionate and caring for the needs and state of others.

Individualism - that self focused lifestyle that our culture promotes - is a danger to the North American church. If we aren't careful, it can impact our ability to be effective lights for Christ in our culture because it prohibits us from being intentional about our love and care for those outside of the church. If we are to combat this in our lives, we need to be praying that the Lord would equip and send labourers, we need to be actively going and seeking those opportunities to pour into others ourselves, and we need to approach others with a deep sense of compassion and love.