



## Discipleship and the Mission of the Church

JT English – March 17, 2019

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It is so good to be with you this morning. My name is JT. I'm one of the pastors here on staff and excited to be with you for our second week in what we're calling our *pastoral prayer* sermon series. If you weren't with us last week, let me get you updated really quickly. We've been in a sermon series on the gospel of John for almost the last year, seven or eight months or so, but our lead pastor Matt has some things in his bones that he wants to tell you that the Holy Spirit, that Jesus is doing in his heart and life, and he wants to preach those things before he goes on sabbatical this summer.

So he asked some of the leadership team to do the same thing, to preach what God is doing in our lives, in our hearts. So it's my privilege to be with you this week and ask the Lord to do some things among us that I think the Bible would have for us. If you have a Bible, open up to Colossians, chapter 1. This morning we're going to be in Colossians 1:24-29, which is a bit shorter than our passage last week. If you weren't here last week, let me catch you up briefly about the things we talked about.

Colossians, chapter 1, is this incredible prayer that Paul is praying for the church in Colossae. He's asking God to do something powerful among this church that he didn't plant himself, but it's this church that he loves, that he knows, and he wants to see become a Christ-centered, Bible-believing, Spirit-empowered church.

Last week, we tried to answer a fairly simple question, not exhaustively but truthfully...*What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus?* What does it mean to give our lives to him, to walk with him day in and day out? Not just to make a decision for Jesus at some point in our childhood or life but to walk with him continually as a disciple.

We said that Colossians 1:9-24 gives us an answer. It says disciples are people or a group of people who grow in a knowledge of God, because God is not just good *to* us but good *for* us; that we should want more of God; that just like any other relationship, we want to grow in a knowledge of him so

we might increase in spiritual fruit, that we might endure all things with patience and joy; that God and God alone is our highest good.

We also said disciples are people who do all things for the glory of Jesus. If you've ever read Colossians 1:15-20, it is one of my favorite passages in the whole Bible, because it's like this Mount Everest that just leads us to see the beauty and awe of Jesus. We talked about how disciples have a really significant risk in their lives. Perhaps the greatest risk, danger, and threat to your life as a disciple of Jesus is to lose your awe of Jesus, for you to grow apathetic, tired, weary, bored with Jesus.

Paul says, "Don't forget your first love. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. All things were created through him and for him, because he is before all things. In him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church." He is our head, and he has come to reconcile and redeem the lost to himself.

So, disciples are a people who grow in a knowledge of God because God is not just good *to* us but good *for* us. We do all things for the glory of Christ because he is the image of the invisible God. Finally, we said disciples are people who never stray or shift from the gospel. It's easy in the Christian life to think the gospel is simply our entry point, and then we move on to spiritual maturity after the gospel, but the reality is... At least this has been true in my *own* life.

The moment I move past the gospel is the moment I most need the gospel. Do you know what I mean? The moment I move past it and think I'm past the elementary things of the gospel is the moment I most have to go back *to* those elementary things of the gospel. So disciples, according to Colossians 1, are people who are growing in a knowledge of God because we love him. We want to do all things for the glory and honor of Jesus because he is God, and we can never stray or shift from the gospel.

The application point was just...Would you pray that that would be the culture of The Village Church, that we would never lose our first love of simply being disciples of Jesus, that we wouldn't follow ministry fads and trends but we would give all honor to Jesus, we would worship him, we would want him above all else?

This week, I want to talk to you about how discipleship in the church matters. Why would God build a family of brothers and sisters, of fathers and mothers, of aunts and uncles, of people from all

tribes, all races, all ethnicities, genders, and age groups? Why would God say discipleship happens in a local church, in a family? That's what we're going to talk about today. Colossians, chapter 1, beginning in verse 24:

**"Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake..."** That's countercultural. Right? **"...and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints.**

**To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."** I love this phrase: **"Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ."** What did Paul see his ministry as? This line right here: **"For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me."**

We're going to spend some time walking through that text. We've said we know what discipleship is, and this week we're considering what the mission of the church is as it relates to discipleship. What's our job? What are we trying to do together as a family of God? Here's my main point for the week: *the primary context for discipleship (what we talked about last week), the primary place, the location that happens is **here**, the local church, where the proclamation of God's Word leads to faithful participation in God's story for the purpose of growing mature disciples.*

The context for discipleship is *here* where we proclaim and participate in God's Word so each and every one of us might grow into being a mature disciple of Christ. The first thing I want to talk about is...*the primary context for discipleship is the local church.* Look back at verses 24 and 25. Paul says, **"Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you..."**

I want to address that first line, not for long but briefly. It's kind of an interesting opening line. Right? "I'm filling up what's lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, the church." Most commentators are unanimous about this. What he's *not* saying is "There's something deficient in what Jesus did, and I somehow am adding to it." He's *not* saying that. What he's saying is "I'm now participating in Christ's afflictions, his body."

As a part of the local church, we are now all participants in living this cruciform life that looks like the life of Jesus. He's saying the cross comes before the crown. We are all picking up our crosses. We're participating in this Jesus-shaped life that often entails afflictions and suffering. We're not filling up because there's some need; we're filling up because we're a part of his body, the church.

I want to be abundantly clear. Paul believes Christ's death does not need to be supplemented in any way but that now you and I, us, the church, even The Village Church, as we fulfill our ministry calling, are going to be exposed to the same suffering Jesus was exposed to. Paul believes the ongoing ministry of Jesus is happening *here* with us, so we should expect the same things that happened to Jesus.

Paul's mission here is to make disciples within the context of the local church. Any real estate agents here? What is the mantra of a real estate agent? "Location, location, location." If Paul was a real estate agent, which he wasn't, but he *is* a pastor... He has a similar mantra. He says location means everything for your discipleship. Where you are being discipled matters. Who is shaping you? Who is forming you? Is it the family of God or is it not?

Paul is saying this location matters, because for the Bible, the local church, the family of God is everything. We are fathers and mothers and brothers and sisters, every tribe, tongue, and language united together not under a common DNA but the blood of Jesus, and we are being shaped and formed into his image. But here's where I want to spend some time thinking this morning. That's not how our culture or the evangelical culture teaches us to think about the church, is it?

How do *we* think about the church? How *I* was taught to think about the church is that it's kind of like a once-per-week conference, where I have no obligation to the people who are next to me; I'm just coming to hear an entertaining and gospel-centered message, where I enjoy it. Maybe I'm not pushed too hard or forced to consider my sin. It's a once-a-week conference where I'm filled up with good news. Or perhaps it's just another Christian ministry I'm involved in. It's no different than that other nonprofit I'm involved in or the podcast I listen to.

A lot of you know my story, but I want to share it with you. I grew up in a wonderful home, a home where my parents loved me, saw me, considered me, wanted the best for me. I just grew up in a wonderful home, but I didn't grow up in a home where I understood Jesus. I went to college at Colorado State University. I think back to this time regularly, because it's just so ironic how God

saves people. My story is a reminder that methods of evangelism don't really matter because God is going to save people regardless of how well we present the gospel or not.

So here I am, a freshman in college. My roommate keeps inviting me to a Campus Crusade Bible study over and over and over again. I say, "No" about 15 times until I finally say, "Fine. I'm going to go just to get you off my back." He tells me, "It's in the basement of the men's dorm in the laundry room." I'm like, "If I would have known that before, I would not have said yes to that invitation, because that's a weird place to have *anything*, let alone a Bible study."

I show up, and he says, "We're in the book of Jonah." In my Bible that I had but had never really opened, I couldn't find the book of Jonah, because the book of Jonah is really small, and if you've never opened the Bible, what are you going to have a hard time finding? Virtually anything, let alone a small book. So what can you *not* do in that moment? You can't act like you don't know what you're doing. You have to act like you know what you're doing, so you just close your Bible like you have the book of Jonah memorized. I can't go to the Table of Contents, because then I out myself.

They realize what's going on. One of the sophomore leaders slowly uses his finger and opens my Bible to Jonah. We're in Jonah, chapter 2. For the first time, I hear a story about one of God's prophets who was being entirely disobedient to God's call on his life, and what does God do? He responds with mercy. Oh my goodness! A God who is merciful to sinners, who's patient and understanding? Yes, he brings discipline, but he also brings relationship. I was blown away by that.

I didn't understand the gospel in that moment, but he said, "Hey, let's go to the food court tomorrow morning. I'm going to buy you Burger King." So there we are, eating Burger King the next day. I have a Whopper in my mouth. He pulls out the *Four Spiritual Laws*, puts it on the table, and says, "I'm supposed to read this with you." I'm like, "Okay." Again, in the most un-compelling gospel presentation in the history of the world, this untrained, non-staff member, who's just a sophomore at Colorado State, proceeds to read the *Four Spiritual Laws* to me.

"God has a wonderful plan for your life. You're a sinner and separated from Jesus. Jesus has died on the cross for you to be forgiven from your sins. Would you like to accept him today?"

"As a matter of fact, I would. That's the best news ever."

That is how God saved me. I'm not kidding. God saved me in the most un-compelling, point-by-point, bullet-pointed gospel presentation you've ever heard in your life. I literally felt like the heavens were opening for me. I was like, "God sees me. God knows I'm a sinner, but he wants to be in relationship with me through Jesus? That's incredible!" So I prayed to receive Christ right there while I was chewing a Whopper.

I began to be discipled in Cru. I had a wonderful experience with Cru. My wife now but my girlfriend at the time, Macy... We started attending local churches. She has a very different story than I do. She grew up in the church. We started finding churches, and I just have to be honest with you. One of the things that was most fascinating to me is I was being discipled more in my nonprofit college context than I was in the context of the local church.

It wasn't that it was a bad church. It was a Jesus-loving, Bible-believing church, but I wasn't really being shaped and formed there. I was being shaped and formed with Cru. So I went to my pastor and said, "Look. I don't know that I want to do this whole ministry thing, but I *do* know I want to know my Bible better. I don't know my Bible at all. I want to understand the Christian faith more. I want to understand how you taught that message. How did you understand what Paul is saying in Romans?"

I'm trying to tell you guys I knew nothing. Nothing! My understanding of the Christian faith was at zero. I didn't grow up with the felt stories, where you have the felt board and are telling Old Testament stories. I didn't grow up hearing the messages that our kids are hearing right now in Little Village and Kids Village. I was starting literally at zero. So what did I do? I was going to my pastor and saying, "Hey, will you disciple me? Can you help me? I feel lost. I love Jesus, but I want to grow." I wasn't saying, "I want to go into ministry." I was just saying, "I want to grow."

Do you know what his answer to me was? "If you want to be discipled, you need to go to seminary." You realize that's the common answer for evangelical churches. That's not uncommon, but what I heard in my mind was, "Wait a second. Isn't that what the church is supposed to do? Isn't that what we should be doing together? Isn't that the body of Christ? You want me to move across the country, spend tens of thousands of dollars to learn my Bible, and I can't do it in the church? Isn't that what *you* do?"

I had to go to seminary, not because I wanted to be an academic but because I wanted to be a disciple. I had to leave the church in order to grow in Christ. Why do we have to leave the church in

order to be disciplined? That was the question that was in my mind. As you guys know, Macy and I are now parents of two little ones, Thomas and Bailey, at home. Thomas is 4. Bailey is 2. If you're ever in the foyer with me, you'll hear my son yelling my name. "Daddy!"

I love my kids so much. Just love them. I want to shape them. I want to form them. I want to see them raised up in maturity. I want to see them grow to love the Lord, to love their neighbor, to love each other. It's one of the greatest privileges of my life. Macy and I want to shape and form them, but we also know we're not their only inputs.

We have a wonderful family around us that's helping us shape and form Thomas. We send them to a wonderful school, a pre-K school, where they're shaped and formed. We have babysitters come over...grandparents, friends. A lot of places where they are being shaped and formed and influenced and cared for, which are good and right and godly.

However, Macy and I would be irresponsible with our calling as their parents if we viewed the supplementary care as their primary care. If we were off-loading their formation to all of those places while neglecting our primary responsibility, we would be irresponsible. Day care can be a wonderful thing, but it's never meant to replace the home.

I fear that in the church we've become inoculated to just how bad our problem is as it relates to discipleship. By *our* I don't mean our, The Village, I just mean our as a whole. We've had to find all of these supplementary sources to help us be disciplined, and the church just becomes one of those supplements, not the main course.

It's not just seminaries. It's also men's ministries, it's women's ministries, and the list goes on and on and on and on. These ministries have come alongside the church in order to faithfully serve us, and we should praise God for them. However, we cannot forget our primary calling, what Paul is saying here in Colossians, chapter 1, that it's *our* responsibility to disciple.

You realize that conversation I had with that pastor so many years ago is what fuels my ministry. That's what fuels why I do what I do, because if a young woman or a young man comes to me and says, "I want to be disciplined," do you know what I want the culture of TVC to be? "Yes." And we can *do* that here. That's exactly what the local church is for. We want to see you shaped and formed into the image of Jesus *here*.

Praise God if you want to have supplementary resources and go to seminary or be involved in a nonprofit ministry. All of those are wonderful, but God's primary calling for that to happen in your life is placed upon the local church. Discipleship *outside* the church is exploding because discipleship *inside* the church is ignored.

So what am I trying to say? I'm trying to say that one of my prayers for TVC is that we would continue to understand ourselves as the family of God, not a conference center. We are not a missions organization. We're not conference speakers. You're not attendees. We are a family that has been given a specific responsibility in stewardship to each other to be the local church.

The second point is *where proclamation of God's Word leads to the faithful participation in God's story*. Look back at the text. Look at verses 25 and 26. About halfway through verse 25, Paul says, "What's my stewardship?" "**...to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.**"

Here's what I want you to see in this part of the text. Proclamation of God's Word... Not just preaching...singing, Home Groups, women's Bible study, men's Bible study, Training Program, missions trips. Whenever we are proclaiming God's Word, the purpose is that we would be found faithful participants in God's story.

The phrase *fully known* here comes from a Greek term, and it doesn't just mean known, like we know God's Word, like we've memorized it, although that's a good thing. It means fully known like it has been so embedded into our guts. It's *here*. It's in our hearts. We think the story told in the Bible is the true story of the world. When you wake up, it is your default story.

You believe Jesus is God, that he is working in the world, that your sins have been forgiven in Christ, and that you can participate in that story. That's what Paul is saying: that you would understand the gospel at such a guttural level. You see, we preach God's Word regularly so we can participate in God's story. We're all being disciplined by stories. Stories are powerful. Stories are incredibly powerful, and because of sin, you by default live in stories that aren't the true story.

You live in stories like perfectionism, pragmatism, romanticism, progressivism...stories that help you make sense of the world, stories that help you make sense of what is happening in the world.

There are true things about those stories, but there are also false things about those stories. I love this quote from a philosopher named Alasdair MacIntyre. He says, "I can only answer the question 'What am I to do?' if I can answer the prior question 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?'"

Do you see what he's saying? He's saying that you're making sense of today, you're making sense of whatever suffering is going on in your life or whatever victory is happening in your life based upon a larger narrative in a story that's helping you make sense of the world. What I'm saying is that the reason we preach God's Word, the reason we sing God's Word, the reason we have Home Groups or men's and women's Bible study is so that the faithful proclamation of God's Word wouldn't just fall on our ears but would make its way into our guts, into our hearts, so we could also be participants *in* that story.

We preach God's Word so we can participate. God is not interested in building an audience of spiritual spectators. You're not an audience today; you're a participant in what God is doing here. Kevin Vanhoozer says it *this* way: "The church has become the theater of the gospel, and in this theater, there are no passive spectators, only engaged participants, acting out what is in Christ." Let me explain that one to you a little bit.

What he is saying is there is not some kind of wall up here where we are performing the gospel and you are watching that happen. We are not the experts and you somehow the amateurs. What he's saying is that the local church is all participating in this story. The reason I'm preaching this story, the reason we're singing this story, and the reason we're singing this story together, the reason we're going to take the Lord's Supper together in a little bit is so that we would begin understanding gospel-centered instincts together.

Whatever is going on in your life...suffering, anxiety, frustration, loss, death, sickness, joy, happiness... Whatever is happening in your life right now, we're proclaiming God's Word so you understand how whatever is happening in your life can be participated in through the gospel. Do you understand what I'm saying? I'm not up here trying to waste my breath just so that you would hear God's Word. I want this to get into your bones. I want the culture of TVC to be so rich and so strong that we are so gospel fluent it just comes out of our guts, it comes out of our hearts, because that's what Paul is saying.

Nobody participates in God's story by default. We have to be preached into it. We have to proclaim ourselves into it, and you have to proclaim it to yourself. This morning when we're singing, "All Hail King Jesus," what are you doing? Reminding yourself, "Jesus is King; I am not. Jesus is King; my boss is not. Jesus is King; my kids are not. Jesus is King; nothing else is." We remind ourselves of the gospel so we can participate in the story.

So, the primary context for discipleship is us, the local church, where we are proclaiming God's Word so we can participate in God's story. Why? *For the purpose of growing mature disciples.* Look back at your text. I love verses 28-29. **"Him we proclaim..."** What does that mean? It means we're not proclaiming ourselves. We're not proclaiming ministry fads.

We're not trying to build a name for The Village Church or *any* local church. We're not trying to build the name of a nonprofit. This is not a marketing scheme. This is not us trying to sell you on some ministry fad. What is the job of the local church? "Jesus is Lord. Jesus is King," and we want to live that out in every single aspect of our lives. **"Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ."**

This text gives us incredible insight into what Paul thought you and I should be doing in the context of the local church and to what he thought the mission of God in the world was. Remember Paul's biography. He's an apostle. He spent years of his life being trained in the gospel. He then went on three extensive missionary journeys that wound him up being shipwrecked, that wound him up in prison. He writes a huge portion of the New Testament.

So I'd say this passage gives him some credibility into teaching us what the mission of God is. He tells us right here. He believed God had called him and the local church to make mature disciples. I want to spend some time thinking about that. *Maturity* can be defined, according to the Bible, as wholehearted, singular devotion to Jesus. Maturity is wholehearted, singular devotion to Jesus. What does that mean? It means God's mission is not mission.

What is God's mission? God's mission is making mature disciples. See, it can be easy to get so caught up in being on mission and being missional, because you can be missional and not be maturing, but what can you *not* be? You cannot be maturing and not be missional. He's saying God's will for your life... If you're wondering what God's will for your life is, it's really simple. What is it? Be shaped and formed into the image of Jesus as a mature disciple. That *is* God's will for your life.

God's will for your life is for you to look more like Jesus tomorrow than you did today, more today than you did yesterday, and more in 10 years and 20 years than you do now. The church cannot be satisfied with decisions for Christ that do not result in disciples *of* Christ. We can't be satisfied with decisions that don't result in disciples. Let me say it as simply as I can. If the church is full of people who have made decisions *for* Christ but have failed to become mature disciples *of* Christ, then we have failed. Paul is not just celebrating new life; he's working toward their maturity.

The mission of God is that you and I, as a church, would grow in our maturity of Christ, that we would see spiritual infants born in Christ, and that we would raise them into maturity. This happened to me. When I became a Christian and wanted to be discipled and wasn't maturing, I confused being missional with being mature. Being on mission *for* Jesus does not equate being mature *in* Jesus. Growing in your maturity in Jesus will mean you're living missionally, but God's purpose is that you would be a mature Christian.

What does Paul think is at stake if this doesn't happen? He tells us in Colossians 2. He gives us three warnings where he says, "If you're not becoming mature in Christ, here is what's at stake for you." He says in Colossians 2:4-5, **"I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments."** What's at risk if you stay in spiritual infancy? You'll be deluded away from the gospel.

He says it again in Colossians 2:8. **"See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ."** What's at risk if you don't mature in Christ? You run the risk of being deceived, because infants can be deceived. He says it again in Colossians 2:18-19. What's at risk? What's at stake if you don't become a mature disciple of Jesus?

**"Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, and not holding fast to the Head [Christ], from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God."**

Paul is showing us in Colossians, chapter 2, what's at stake if we don't listen to him in Colossians, chapter 1. Colossians, chapter 1: "Be disciples of Jesus." Where should that happen? In the context of the local church. If it doesn't happen, you will be deluded, you will be deceived, and you may be disqualified. He's warning us, saying, "If you stay in spiritual infancy, you might be deceived out of your relationship with Christ."

He is insistent about us growing in maturity, because infants can be deluded, deceived, and disqualified. What Paul is trying to say here is that God's mission is to make mature disciples, whole people who with singular devotion, a wholeheartedness, are growing in their affections for Jesus, who treasure him above everything else.

Our success as a church is not determined by numbers. How many people are here this morning? How many programs do you have? How many dollars can you raise? How many church planters have you sent out? How many people are on the mission field? Those are all wonderful things that I pray God richly blesses us with, but that's not how our success is determined.

How is our success determined according to this text? Our success is determined by the increase of people's knowledge and love of the one true God, as we grow in our devotion to Jesus. I'm really encouraged. I think this is happening here. Do you realize this is really hard? This is really hard, but I think it's happening here. I don't know if you were here just a few weeks ago for the Celebration Services. Some of the testimonies were incredible.

I was talking with Julie Wilding, our preschool minister, and she was telling me stories of six or seven of the young men or women who were baptized, these 6-, 7-, and 8-year-olds. She held them as infants. How cool is that? To sit over there and watch these kids go through Little Village and then Kids Village, literally hold them with a bottle, nursing them, feeding them, supplementing them, nourishing them, and then moving them on. Not getting to reap the reward of them making a decision for Christ but getting to sit in here with tears in your eyes watching them say, "Jesus is Lord." Isn't that incredible? The Spirit of God is doing it among us.

What I'm trying to say is that it doesn't stop there for these little ones. Our job as a church is to come around them, to point them to Jesus, to continually show them the beauty of Jesus, to show them the glory of God in the gospel, to encourage them to seek maturity. It's not just going to go to middle school and high school, but here's my vision.

Here's my hope for our church: that we would be the kind of church that points those little boys and little girls, who are already growing in their maturity in Christ (they're still infants, but they're growing), to the kind of life where they're 70- or 80- or 90-year-old men and women, 70 years from now, and they're testifying of God's goodness and grace in their lives because they were discipled in their local church.

I want one of those little girls to get up 70 years from now in The Village Church and say, "This church has always pointed me to Jesus," and she might be an 85-year-old ferocious woman of God. That's what Paul is talking about here: family, discipleship. Not a conference, not attendees, but participants, fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, doing this together. That's the kind of church I want us to be.

But like I said, this is so hard. David Wells, commenting on how hard this is, says, "It is very easy to build churches in which seekers congregate..." That's easy, especially in Texas. "...it is very hard to build churches in which biblical faith is maturing into genuine discipleship." Which one are *you*, if you were doing a gut check this morning, and what kind of a church do you want to be a part of?

Are you praying toward the ends that we wouldn't simply be a church where seekers are congregating...? Certainly we *want* seekers to congregate here. You're welcome here, but our goal for you is that you wouldn't *stay* a seeker; you would become a worshiper and grow in your affection and awe of Jesus.

Here's Paul's "mic drop" moment as we wrap up. This passage would be so incredibly difficult to preach if this last verse wasn't here. Look at verse 29 with me. "**For this I toil...**" Paul is saying, "Everything we've just talked about? That's my aim. My goal is the mission of God of discipleship of people in the local church to proclaim and participate in God's Word. That's what I'm working for." "...**struggling** [toiling, laboring] **with all his energy...**" Friends, if this is left to us, we *will* fail, but if Jesus does this among us, we will succeed.

If we are struggling with *his* energy that he powerfully works within us, then this will succeed. Paul is saying, if you are on this mission of discipleship in the local church, which is going to involve suffering, conflict, anxiety, toiling, laboring... If you're on that mission, who are you on mission with? With Jesus. Where is Jesus working? *Here*, in the midst of the mess and brokenness and frustration and pain and labor and toil. He says Jesus is the one accomplishing this among us. By God's grace, Jesus is working by the power of his Holy Spirit here today.

Too often we ask the question, "Okay, JT. Well, what are we to do?" I'm not going to tell you something to do this week. I want to ask a different question. I want to ask you *this* question...*Who are we supposed to be?* You have to ask the question of *being* sometimes before you ask the question of *doing*. Who are we supposed to be according to these texts over the last few weeks?

I think the Bible is giving us a vision of our identity as disciples of Jesus. My hope is not just us, as individuals, but us, as a community of faith, that we would be a community of disciples that's growing in our knowledge and love of God, that we will never shift or stray from the glory of Jesus or from the hope of the gospel, that we would never leave these things behind, because the moment you leave the gospel is the moment you most need the gospel. But not just that...that we would embody discipleship as a local church.

You can never be too committed to discipleship, to growing in your single-hearted devotion to Jesus. That we would proclaim God's Word together. What we're about to do in a few minutes as we partake of the Lord's Supper... What are we doing? Proclaiming so we can participate. You're proclaiming his death to your neighbors, to the watching world, that we believe Jesus Christ is Lord and that we would struggle and toil until every single one of us is mature in Christ.

That all of us would grow in our singular devotion for him. Not just us in this room; that the kids next door, Little Village and Kids Village...they're hearing about the love of God this morning...that one of them might place their faith in Jesus today, get baptized in a few months at a Celebration Service, and then what? Would it stop? No. That we would have a culture that points them to being mature disciples of Jesus over the rest of their lives.

So, what I want to do is invite you to pray, to seek, to ask the Lord that he would do this among us. What we're talking about here isn't a program; it's a culture. We can't "curricularize" this. We can't just put some nifty programs together in order to accomplish this. Jesus must do it. Holistic discipleship is not a curriculum; it's a culture we have to embody together and collectively.

If God's will for your life is to make you a mature disciple of Jesus, I want to ask you a few questions as we wrap up. Where do you lack wholehearted and singular devotion to Christ this morning? What in your life are you still trying to control? Is there a relationship where your joy and comfort is the highest goal? Is there something in your life that you have placed above the gospel?

What's competing for your love and affection for Jesus? When was the last time you were confronted with the text by the power of the Holy Spirit and said, "I need to make a life change; I need God to redirect my affection and attention back to him"? Is it that you've lost your awe of Jesus? Where are you asking him to mature you, to shape and form your affections for Christ?

Here's what I want to do. I want to invite you to pray for two things as we worship and as we partake of the Lord's Supper. Ask the Lord to do this among *us* and ask the Lord to do it in you first. Ask the Lord to do it among us, but ask the Lord to do it in you first, that by the power of the Holy Spirit we would grow into a body of Christ of mature disciples of Jesus. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you this morning. We thank you for the ministry of Paul and his proclamation of the gospel, his insistence on Christian maturity and the grace of the good news that Jesus will be the one who accomplishes it, that we get no glory, we get no fame, we get no acclamation, but he is Lord. Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone, so we can present everyone mature in Christ. Would you do that among us? In Christ's name we pray, amen.