

Sent
Take Heart Series

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Welcome to our online service! My name is Darnell and I serve on our Generosity and Outreach Team here at The Creek. Over the past few weeks I have been blown away by our church's commitment to being "for the 317," even in the middle of a crisis like COVID-19. Our church is *still* on a mission to connect people to Jesus and that is absolutely amazing.

I've noticed something even before I started serving here at The Creek. I worked at Shepherd Community Center, on the near east side here in Indianapolis - I met my wife Lindley there - and before that I worked as a church planter in Canada. And even though all those places are very different, I've noticed a theme: God's people stay on mission regardless of their circumstances.

The past few weeks we've been in a series called "Take Heart." Jesus told us that in this world we would have many troubles, but to take heart, because Jesus has overcome the world.

Jesus is sovereign over death, over any storm. And even in the middle of our storms, he gives us a peace that surpasses all understanding. And today we're going to see that Jesus not only calls us to endure the storm, but that he actually sends us out so that we can be hope and love to others. This is a theme that we see all throughout the Bible - God calling people to himself and then sending them out into the world. I want to look at a few examples as we get started.

In Genesis, God called Abraham and he said, "Leave your country, leave your family, leave your father's house," and then in Genesis 12:2, we see why: God says, "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing." You see, God called Abraham not only to bless him, but to bless the people *around* him.

Then in Exodus 19, we see Israel, the nation that God had formed through Abraham. Just a few weeks earlier God had delivered them from slavery in Egypt, and then he says to them through Moses, "if you keep my covenant" - meaning if you stay in relationship with me - "you will be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." God's saying, "I've delivered you from slavery so that you can be my ministers to the world."

In the New Testament, Peter applies this to the entire Church. He says, "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation for God's possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." That's us! We're chosen by God to be in relationship with him and then to go out and be a light to the rest of the world.

Let's look at one of the Old Testament prophets, Micah. The people of Israel have begun to drift away from relationship with God. God asks them in chapter 6, "O my people, what have I done to you? How have I wearied you? Answer me! For I brought you up from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery." Then Micah asks the people, "With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"

Micah's asking, "What do you think God wants from us?" Burnt offerings, calves, rams, oil? How about our children? He knows that's not what God wants. He says in verse 8: "He has told you, O man, what is good; do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God." God's not asking for their wealth or even their firstborn children. God says, "You want to know what I want? I want you to walk with Me, I want you to do justice and to love kindness. That's what I require, and that's why I delivered you from Egypt."

But God doesn't just send us, God goes on mission himself. Most of us have heard John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life." And the next verse says, "God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him." That's the message we're sharing.

Let's read one more passage in John, before we look at what Jesus said in Matthew 25. In John 20, Jesus has been crucified and buried, the disciples are scared and hiding from the authorities and then Jesus just shows up. And he says, "Peace be with you." That's a good place to start, since they had just seen him killed over the weekend and thought they were probably next. "Jesus said to them again 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.' And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'" God is *on mission*. The Father sends the Son, the Son sends us, and the Holy Spirit goes with us as we go out into the world. This is what we call this the "Great Commission," but we've already seen that this is not a new commission. This is what God has been doing all throughout history.

Now let's look at Matthew 25 and see what that looks like for us. In Matthew 25, Jesus is on a mountain overlooking Jerusalem and this is what he says to his followers, starting in verse 31: "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'"

Jesus is talking about the kingdom here. We've been talking about the mission and being sent. This is the objective; this is what we're working towards - the day Jesus comes and makes everything right! It's happening right now, our church and believers around the world are advancing the kingdom, bringing heaven to earth, drawing people into the family of God. But in this moment Jesus is giving us a glimpse into that future. No more pain, no more suffering, no more quarantine, no more toilet paper shortages. It's going to be amazing! So Jesus starts putting his people, the sheep, to the right and the people that have rejected him, the goats, to the left. Let's pick up in verse 35: "'For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'"

Then Jesus turns to the goats, the people who haven't done these things: "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'"

One of the things I love about this passage, which I hadn't noticed it until a friend of mine pointed it out a few weeks ago, is that Jesus doesn't identify with the helper. Jesus identifies with the one being helped. And I love that because I've been one of the "least of these." So when I see Jesus saying "that's me," that's the kind of love I want to show people I serve. Think about what would happen if we, as a church, looked at people and *we saw Jesus*. That's what it means to reflect the love of Christ.

An author I like, Joseph Stowell, says that fully developed followers of Christ are like "mirrors in motion." As followers we replicate the grace, mercy, love, justice, compassion, truth and righteousness of Christ, our leader. And it's not just physical and it's not just spiritual, it's both. Dan said a couple weeks ago, "We're not just physical beings, we're emotional, we're relational and we're spiritual."

And that's what we see here. There's food, drink, shelter, and clothing but there's also visiting the sick, giving emotional support. Jesus says, "I was in prison and you came to Me." It's not talking about breaking people out of jail or anything, it's saying people need encouragement. That's really important for people like me. I love helping people but I almost always think, "What can I physically do?" And that's good, but people need so much more than that.

I read an article by Chris Ordway, he was a senior advisor for HOPE International in East Africa. He was serving in Rwanda and he asked 20 people how they would define poverty. Now these are people living on 1-2 dollars a day. This is what they said.

Poverty is:

1. An empty heart.
2. Not knowing your strengths and abilities.
3. Not being able to make progress.
4. Isolation.
5. No hope or belief in yourself and not being able to take care of your family.

Not just physical, not just spiritual. When we serve, we've got to serve the whole person.

Now you hear that and it makes you want to jump on a plane and head to East Africa, right? And global missions are awesome, we're called to "go into all the world." But think about who Jesus is talking to here - these people didn't have the means to travel far. They may have never gone more than 100 miles from the place they were born. Some of us can't travel far either, and that's okay! The point is that you don't need to travel far to love people the way that Jesus did. We are surrounded by people who need to experience this kind of love. And not just during a pandemic either - I'm talking about loving our neighbors, our friends, coworkers, spouses every day. That's what it means to be "for the 317."

Now you're thinking, "Great, Dan just preached on having peace that surpasses all understanding, I'm feeling good, no anxiety." Then the outreach guy gets up and says, "Says right here you're going to hell if you don't get out there and start serving people!" Or you're like me and you think, "Great! All I have to do is stuff? I'll volunteer, I'll give a little extra money and then when Jesus comes, I'll just head over to the right with the sheep and wait for my reward." *Neither* of those are what Jesus is teaching. We know from Scripture that our place in the kingdom is not based on how much we do or how much we don't do. Our place in the kingdom is secured by our *faith* and our *love* for Jesus Christ.

But you can't have a love like that without it changing you. Our faith is alive, and it works its way from within us outward. The problem with the goats was they didn't actually love Jesus. Because when you really love Jesus, you start to look like him and sound like him and serve like him. We saw this earlier: God calls us into relationship with him, we become his "treasured possession," and then from that relationship we go into the world.

In John 21, Jesus asked Peter three times, "Peter, do you love me?" Peter said, "Lord, you know I love You." And Jesus says okay, here's what that looks like: "go feed my sheep." I know the title of this message is "Sent," but I think we need to sit and think about what needs to happen in

our lives to make us fall so in love with Jesus that when we look at someone, we see his image. Because when we love Jesus like that, loving and serving people is just the other side of the coin.

A good friend of mine, Keith Waggoner, pastors a church in Nampa, Idaho. One of their core beliefs as a church is that “saved people serve people.” It’s a package deal. That’s just what it means to be a Christian. You begin to feel for others what Jesus feels about you.

I love doing word studies, so I looked up the Greek word for compassion. It’s *splagchnizomai*, and it means to be moved in your inward parts, to feel right in your stomach. It’s not sympathy - it’s deeper than that. I’m pretty good at sympathy, but this is something else, this is something that *moves* you. And when Jesus sees people and the Bible uses this word, two things happen: Jesus *feels* something and he *does* something.

Matthew 9: Jesus sees the helpless, feels compassion, tells the disciples to pray.

Matthew 14: Jesus sees a crowd, feels compassion, heals the sick.

Matthew 15: Jesus sees hungry people, feels compassion, feeds 4,000.

Looks down from eternity, sees a broken world, feels compassion, and comes to save us.

This is who Jesus is and when we’re called into relationship with Him, this is who we start to become. Think about the most compassionate person you know. Your spouse, your mom and dad, maybe a really good friend. Most of us can think of something that they’ve done for us.

For me, it’s my mom. It’s Mother’s Day, my mom is watching right now - hi mom, I love you, happy Mother’s Day! My mom and dad adopted me when they were in their 50’s. They’ve had more than 30 foster kids over a span of 10 years. And when I talked to my mom last week, she said, “If I could have, I would have adopted every one of them.” So I asked her, “Why would you do something like that?” She said, “Because Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to me.’” My mom loves Jesus, so when she heard him speak, she *did something*. And when I thanked her for adopting me and making that kind of sacrifice, she said, “It wasn’t a sacrifice. I had to do it.” That’s what it means to feel compassion the way Jesus did. Jesus doesn’t bully us or shove us out into the world, he calls us and he loves us, and when we love him, it changes us.

Earlier we looked at Micah - and I want to look at another Old Testament prophet named Isaiah. Isaiah lived in a different city, but he was alive during the same time period as Micah in Judah. And the background really makes the story: Judah’s king, Uzziah, had just died. He was king for over 50 years - he was the only king Isaiah would have known up to this point. And to make matters worse, the Assyrian Empire was planning a war against Judah. Now to put that into perspective, the Assyrian Empire was twice the size of Indiana...and Judah was about the size of Rhode Island.

That's the background of Isaiah's vision in Isaiah 6. In his vision, he sees the Lord sitting on a throne high and lifted up and angels singing, "Holy, holy, holy," and when he sees this, he feels completely unworthy to be a prophet or to serve God. In verse 5, he says,

"Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts! Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth and said: 'Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.'" Then in verse 8 - "And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' Then I said, 'Here I am! Send me.'"

Even in the middle of a crisis, God doesn't press pause on the mission. He's still looking for people who are willing to be sent. And even though Isaiah felt completely unworthy and lost, God cleanses him and then sends him out to serve. All throughout the Bible, we see God using men and women, just like you and me. And what does God do? He *cleanses* them, he *loves* them and then he *sends* them out.

If I had to narrow the idea of "being sent" into three points, they would be:

Love Jesus.

See Jesus.

Serve Jesus.

Because when we love Jesus, we start seeing his image on everybody around us. And if we see him, we're going to start serving him wherever we find him. I don't know what that's going to look like, and it's going to be different for every person. But this church is filled with stories of people that have been helped because we took being sent seriously. I want to share one of those stories now - check out Sarah's story. (View the video recording of this sermon to see this video).

Sarah is one of so many people that have experienced the impact of what happens when God's people respond to his call.

I mentioned earlier that I'm adopted and the impact that it's had on me. And since May is National Foster Care Month and one of our partners is an adoption and foster care agency, I wanted to take a minute and say something about Bethany Christian Services. Bethany does incredible work for children in need. Joe Shultz, one of their directors, is a member here at The Creek. I went to their website to see if I could find a way to connect them to this message. And when I scrolled down at the bottom of their home page, I saw Matthew 25:40, "Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these, you did it to Me." I couldn't ask for a better connection. So take a look at Bethany Christian Services, their information is on our website

(thecreek.org). They're one of the incredible organizations that we have the opportunity to partner with and to support as a church family.

I pray that as God's people, we respond to this call, to this mission to be sent the same way that Isaiah did when he said, "Here I am, send me!"

As we take communion, take whatever you have that represents Christ's body that was broken for us and his blood that was shed for us. Think about the incredible love that Jesus has for us displayed in his coming, his taking our suffering, and his calling us into relationship with him.