

Series: Soul Life	Reference: <i>Various Passages</i>	Title: The Called Life - Peace	Date: 12.20.2020
Website Writeup: <i>This is our last sermon in this short series. We've looked at the Inner, Family & Work Life, and now we will look at the Called Life. In this sermon we will wrestle with the question, "Do you have a mission in life – or does a mission have you?" In a day when our sense of calling is often rooted in our need to feel special & unique, isn't it odd that Jesus, in the Great Commission, seems to give every Christian who ever lived the very same calling?</i>			

This is our last sermon in this series, *Soul Life*. We've looked at the Inner, Family & Work Life, now we will look at the Called Life.

CS Lewis once said, "...The first job each morning consists...in listening to that other voice, taking that other point of view, letting that other larger, stronger, quieter life come flowing in."

He's referring to the simple act of having a quiet time. Of sitting down, shutting everything else out, sitting at the feet of Jesus, allowing Him to speak through prayer, our direct connection with God the Father through the Holy Spirit. Inquiring. Listening. Understanding what God's trying to say to us specifically. It's done through digging into the Word of God, to understand what God's saying both to you, and all of us together. To what does He call us, is the question with which we wrestle. A Quiet time...indispensable in spiritual formation.

Kim & I have instituted a few things in our marriage. We try to go on daily walks together. Try go to bed at the same time & kiss each other good night. All these things enable us time to communicate desires, struggles & joys with each other; affording us also the time to hear the other persons heart & build intimacy.

Likewise, that attention needs to be given to our relationship with Jesus as well. Another resource we have here at Six:Eight which speaks of this is the small booklet, *My Heart, Christ's Home* - grab one & take it home.

When we do spend time with Him, one of the things God says to us is something we've brought up numerous times in past weeks; **Matthew 6:33, "But seek first his kingdom & his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."** Which speaks of the pursuit of His Will & Holiness - His kingdom reign. Imagine sitting together in a quiet room with Jesus, He quietly leans in & voices those words to you - "Jason, seek first my will & righteousness, and I will take care of everything else in your life." How would that feel? What assurance would it give, and what would it mean? What does it mean to seek His Kingdom & righteousness?

One sure way of knowing God's will is through His Word. When you read, for example, what we traditionally call the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20, you realize what's on God's heart right away! He's speaking to us...

“Therefore go & make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Go & make disciples of all nations (people groups), calling them to obedience through the faith. A command with a promise that He's with us always. Something Jesus also voices in the quietness of our time with Him - to you & me, not just the missionary types. Ralph Winter once said, *“The Bible is not the basis of mission, mission is the basis of the Bible.”* God speaks to all of us about His mission through its pages.

I recently listened to a little snippet of one of Francis Chan's sermons, which popped up on Facebook. He said, in reference to this issue of discipleship, we've done God a disservice. We focus so much on memorization. Not that we shouldn't memorize, since we're called to store up the Word in our hearts.

However, to make his point, he used the example of his daughter, saying...what if he told his daughter to go clean her room, and she said, “OK”, then walked away. Four hours later she came back & said, “Dad I want you to know that I memorized what you said. You said, ‘Go clean your room.’” But she hadn't cleaned. Then she says, “And by the way I even went a step farther, and invited six of my friends over to do a word study on what it would look like if I actually cleaned my room - aren't you proud of me?” Is that what her father wanted? Obviously not. However, it's how we often treat the Word of God. Go & make disciples of all nations...let's memorize & study that for the next ten years without actually doing it!

Do you have a mission in life – or does a mission have you? In a day when our sense of calling is often rooted in our need to feel special & unique, isn't it odd that Jesus, in the Great Commission, gives every Christian who ever lived the *very same calling?* Go & make disciples of all nations, teaching them to obey...etc...

Paul was a man captured by Jesus' mission, in 1 Corinthians 9:16 he says, *“For when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, since I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!”* Captured by the mission of Jesus. Like we said last week, living out of allegiance to Christ first & foremost above all else - do we do everything for the sake of Jesus? Are we compelled by the mission of Christ in the world?

It's really a question of desire, isn't it? Everything we do is driven by desire. And if God's glory among the nations isn't our desire, are we following Jesus? If not, the only thing which will bring about that desire is intimate time with Him in Word & Prayer.

I think of Stanley Albert Dale, missionary to violent tribes in Irian Jaya, who died by being shot full of arrows - a man captured by the mission of Christ & whose death spawned the gospel among those who killed him! A man who faced death because his desire for Jesus' mission was strong enough for him to say yes when called.

But even closer to home we have examples of those people living in the center of their calling, and how they're being Jesus to others. Using their gifts & calling to reveal Jesus to others around them.

I think of Kathleen Labeledz, whose heart's as large as large can be for those around her who don't yet know Jesus. She prays for & with people constantly. A woman captured by the call of Christ, her desire leads her to do something about it. I think about Chuck & Christy pushing past fears to pray over people & share the gospel when they see opportunity.

We need these examples since they reflect that **God Has A Burning Desire...**In John 3:16, an often memorized verse for evangelicals, it says, "*for God so loved the world that he gave his one & only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*"

God's desire must've been incredibly strong for Him to take that step. In thinking about that sacrifice, and His last words to us before going to the cross, ask yourself, do your own desires naturally seem to take precedence over God's? Whose dreams are you seeking to fulfill? Do you have a life's mission, or have you been captured by Christ's?

John Wimber often said, the work of Jesus is *everyone's* calling - everyone gets to play - to love the unlovable, serve our enemies, care for the poor, strengthen the weak, heal the sick, equip the saints, and to do the works of the Kingdom. God's love for the world must become our love for the world. His desire for all nations to know & glorify Him, must be our own. Not just memorized, but lived out.

Don't you hate it if you're misquoted, or when your words are taken out of context? Or, like Francis & his daughter, that people didn't actually do what you say, but only remembered what you said? This happens to pastors constantly, we have 30 minutes to say a lot, and inevitably something we say gets misconstrued. Or people say, "Good sermon," then go do the opposite.

God's the same. There's a reason He recorded His Words for us & been as clear in speaking to us. So many wring their hands wondering what God's will is, when it's there in black-and-white on the pages of Scripture. Typically we need no more direction than it, there are thousands of opportunities out there to live it. We have all the freedom to choose from among them, but often we only hear & not do. Instead of looking at opportunity, saying, "This falls within the call of God, I'll do that," we strive for a laid out plan which is special & unique only to us, because we view ourselves as special.

I've often heard people quote the part of Isaiah 56:7 which says, "My house will be called a house of prayer." They say, God wants us to become a House of Prayer. Sounds so devoutly religious. We should be a prayerful people, but prayerful about what!? Who should be a prayerful people? Whose house is it anyway? God says it's my house; a house of prayer, but for what, or whom? **Since we often cut off the latter part of the verse which tells us for whom His house of prayer is for, "...for all nations."** The church should be a place for all nations to find God, and for us to be not only praying, but proclaiming to them, so that all nations do!

At one time we looked at Mark 11, the passage of Jesus overturning the tables at the Temple sandwiched between the toast of the fig tree narrative. Jesus goes through Bethany to Jerusalem & encounters a fig tree in full bloom but without any fruit, so He curses it. He then goes to the Temple, finding that people were using it as a way just to

extort money from people, so he overturns the tables. Then on the way back, He takes the same route, and the Disciples realize the tree is withered & dead. Bethany, translated means, 'The House of Figs.' The Temple is called the House of prayer for all nations. His point was, by that route Jesus encountered a fruitless fig tree, but it's exactly where you'd expect to find figs. And when you walk through the Temple, the House of Prayer for all Nations, you expect to find all nations gathered praying, or at the least, Israel praying for & sharing with all people groups coming through there to know God!

But instead the Temple had become the same as that fig tree in full bloom, but devoid of any fruit. The Temple was glorious to look at, but it was not bearing the fruit of its calling. It was symbolic of empty pretense. It wasn't just the greed He was confronting - it was the fact that Israel hadn't heard, nor acted on what He'd said - He wanted His house to be a house of prayer for all nations - but they were about their mission, not His. They'd memorized the words, but hadn't acted on them. And in all this, as individuals we must think what it means to us personally.

Which leads us to our second point today, **God Has A Brilliant Design**. In 1 Cor. 12:7 it says, *"Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good."*

You're all empowered to play a role in this kingdom call. Do you love who God has uniquely made you to be? Or, do you constantly compare yourself to others? Do you wallow in self-pity, constantly thinking about what your not, instead of who you were uniquely created to be in Jesus?

See you actually are unique & special, but that's not where you should focus. Instead, you should focus on how God wants to use your uniqueness in His kingdom building call. None of us are so special that we are exempt from participating in God's mission.

Our special reflection of God's heart is shaped by genetics, personality, upbringing, thinking, skill set, inclinations & natural giftedness. It's all precious & useful towards the common good of others in knowing God. We spoke last week of the importance of our work, and how we're to be reflecting Christ in all we do & say. We each have others who rely on us, we influence & are called to serve.

As individuals, we're each like stained glass through which God's light uniquely streams. Stained glass windows are put together piece by piece, to make a complete window design. We don't shine alone, we shine better together in community. And it's not really the window itself, but the light shining through it, in what it produces which is amazing. The light passing through each unique piece together in the whole shines out this beautiful myriad of colors on the world around it. Great image of the church with Christ shining through us.

Dave & Lee Hall, our missionaries in N. Africa, were called there with their unique gifting. We all had an influence on shaping them before they went & sustaining them while there. The two women we support in the ME also have their unique makeups which makes them suitable for that kingdom work there.

Each one of us has our unique influences & people we're called to serve. I'd urge you to develop a Prayer Shield. Prayer shields are groups of people holding you up, praying for

your development & effectiveness in ministry. Coupled with that, hopefully what you learn here, and through your Community Group Studies, prepares you to influence well with respect & gentleness.

Likewise, often Kingdom Opportunities through this church utilize our gifts, abilities & skills in kingdom work together. We're better together.

Which brings us to our 3rd point today...**God Has A Bright Destiny For Us All.** In Phil. 3:10-12 it says, *"I want to know Christ - yes, to know the power of his resurrection & participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me."*

Focusing in on that last statement, to press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me...let us ask, is the Good News of God's resurrecting love, and his New Creation yet to come, just for us - or to be shared with everyone? Obviously, everyone. We've seen not only today, but through past series & sermons here at Six:Eight, that His burning desire is for all nations to know & worship Him. He's taken hold of us, for the expressed purpose of seeing His burning desire realized among all nations. Hence, His last command, becomes our first concern, to go & make disciples of all nations, right here, and across the world.

We have refugees from various people groups/nations coming to us! There are 6 major relocation services in America. 3 of which are headquartered in Philly. Philadelphia has been designated as a relocation site for refugees. Syrians & other people groups coming in over time. One more divine opportunity to fulfill our calling among the nations. What people groups will God bring us through those avenues, and how can we shine the light of Christ into their lives?

I was once in a crowd with a woman who'd befriended some refugee women. One of which was a Saudi Muslim. This young Muslim woman'd been asking questions about Jesus. When my friend gave her a Bible in Arabic, she said she'd smuggle it back into Saudi Arabia & read it cover to cover, being so excited to finally have her own copy! And it's most interesting that culturally she could never ask for a copy herself, but when given one by this woman she was extremely grateful - you have to wonder how many Muslims would be grateful for a copy of the Scriptures in their own language! **William Cameron Townsend** once said, *"The greatest missionary is the Bible in the mother tongue."* So true!

Through our individual design, God will lead us to delightful & stunning opportunities to extend His loving Kingdom. That may or may not mean a relationship with a Saudi Muslim. It may be your Jewish neighbor. The unchurched guy you run into through your Community Group Opportunities. The young lady you buy coffee from every weekday morning. Or, your coworker. It's every human being's calling to know God, and to be made whole by God. Our true calling is to help an intimate exchange of life with God happen for those we're given to influence. God's calling the church to arrange the meeting with other peoples of all nations!

Faith is spelled R.I.S.K! And risk is interesting. Maybe you took the risk to involve yourself in a Community Group. At one time that seemed so daunting, but now you're comfortable. And now it may seem like such a risk to step out as a witness to those you have influence with, but again, that fear will diminish with practice as well.

This week we celebrate Christmas - the coming of Christ into the world in the most obscure & lowest of ways. We call that the incarnation. Meaning God became man & lived among us - Immanuel, God with us. As we view that child lying in the manger we think of what it means; what it says to us. How does that translate into a model of our own calling? God put himself into the world, to show the world how much He loves. Changing the world from the inside out. Immersing himself into the blood & guts of creation to redeem it once more. He gave his only begotten Son, so that anyone who would believe in Him shall have eternal life. He limited his divinity to the shell of human flesh, lived all the pains & struggles we do. Yet...was without sin, in order to be the perfect sacrifice, paving the way for reconciliation to God. God went to such great lengths. He didn't sit back & just mouth the words, and study the question, "What would it *look like* if I sacrificed myself for these lost souls?" He did it. He lived it out among us.

The incarnation is a model of ministerial life for all of us. As we see Jesus enter our world, He becomes our model. We enter the world of others bearing the message of forgiveness & reconciliation in Christ - Go & make disciples of all nations. We don't get caught up in fear or politics because Jesus is with us - our allegiance & protection fall first & foremost under His guiding hand.

Might we die? Yes, we might. Stanley Albert Dale did, and many others throughout history have. Might we suffer? Definitely. But we suffer in self-sacrifice, following our model Jesus, bringing life back to a dying world. Remember Paul said he rejoices he was found worthy of suffering for the sake of Christ! It's true, "*The cross bears those who bear the cross*" (Sadhu Sundar Singh, 1889-1929).

Betty Scott Stam, who died at the young age of 27 alongside her husband as missionaries in China offered her life to Christ - "*Use me as you will, send me where you will, work out your whole will in my life at any cost, now & forever.*" The last thing her husband wrote was "*My wife, baby & myself are today in the hands of communist bandits. Whether we will be released or not no one knows. May God be magnified in our bodies, whether by life or by death. Philippians 1:20*"¹ *Philippians 1:20 says, I eagerly expect & hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.*

In the face of such courage, how shallow does our indifference to God's mission seem...

You want a Christmas sermon. Here it is...go be like Jesus. No reserve. No retreat. No regrets (William Borden)... Be enamored. Be enthralled with the call of God. Follow your model who gave up everything. Who incarnated Himself so that you, along with countless others would have the chance at wholeness once more. A god who'd go to such lengths for you that it compels you to show & tell others about Him. Be captured by His

¹ <http://omf.org/us/the-martyrdom-of-john-and-betty-stam/#sthash.BsK3bWYU.dpuf>

calling. Don't just memorize the story, live it. Be an influence for Jesus wherever you are, at all times. Stop following your own mission in life, and be about God's to make disciples of all nations to His glory!

Ask yourself, is there much about who God is, and who I am, that I have yet to discover? Is there something God's saying you may've missed? Have we read the Scriptures through the lens of a milquetoast subculture? Have we just relied on another's interpretation of Scripture like Isaiah 56:7 instead of reading it & wrestling with what God's really saying?

Ask the Holy Spirit, to allow you to hear His voice above the din of all others clamoring for attention. To give you ears to hear His daily calling on your life as His follower, and in your specific role in your mission to love the world to wholeness. Ask Him how you fit into the specific calling of this local church & what we're doing together in the world. Glue yourself into the mosaic which is the stained glass window of the local church. Stop theorizing. Start living it! Merry Christmas! Merry, Glorious Incarnation Day!

As we've done for the past three weeks, we end today with another testimony. Today we hear from Kim Guynes...let me pray as she comes up.