

The Rev. Billy Cerveny:

How are we doing? All right. We got any scores out there? Patriots fans? No. Good. I don't want to know. Don't tell me. You know, one of the great joys of life I have discovered is, is having a new car. You like having a new car?

You get a new car. And I feel like you just feel like system. It's, like, really exciting. One of the worst things, though, is trying to find a new car. Like having a new car. Awesome. Buying a new car. Terrible. One of the reasons I feel that way is that when you go in, everything's great. You kind of know the car you want to get until you get in into the dealership.

You start dealing with the different trim packages, and it's just this total emotional game because you have this the basic, you have the premium packages, you have the premium elite package, the luxury premium mood altering package. Right. And all of a sudden you get deeper into this. You're like, well, I gotta have this. I cannot have that.

You begin to and you begin to it becomes about a spiritual identity. Almost. Right. Like, I gotta get this thing. I can't have that. And the second you buy it and you roll off the lot, you see somebody else that has, like, what you got, but like, with two clicks better and you feel terrible about yourself, or you're like, why didn't I get that?

I remember I used to have this Dodge Ram 1500 is like a 1990 something. It was a basic truck. And I remember on the dashboard it had all these little plastic squares on the dashboard. And my buddy got in there and he goes, nice poverty buttons. I'm like, what are poverty buttons? He goes, you know those plastic squares right there?

Those were all the, like, upgrade features that you didn't pay for. So they just put these little plastic button fillers in there that didn't do anything. Poverty buttons I love it. I had those. Yes. My Dodge Ram. I think it's the reason I'm telling you that story is I think it's so often we can treat our Christian life like this, that we come in and we feel like, okay, I drive my faith, I become a believer.

I come off a lot. I'm sort of this baseline model, right? I got cloth seats, I've got a cup holders. You know, I've got the I got a few poverty buttons on my dash, or at least maybe I'm feeling pretty good about my ride until I pull in and I begin to see other people and what they're driving.

I see other people. I mean, they seem to have a better trim package than me. This person seems to have these sort of evangelism package. They're a lot better at this than I am. And they pray with their hands in the air. They sing with their hands in the air. Or you got this other person over here who has the Bible study package, and they're really good at this, and they sit on the front row at church and their Bible has highlighters on it and, and, you know, post-it notes and all these kind of things.

And, you know, how do I compete with that? Then all of a sudden, whoa, this is where everybody stops when the guy that rolls up with the missionary package, you know, the brother comes up with the Great Commission paint job, and you're out there and you're like, that is the top shelf, because that's a true servant of the Lord, the one that leaves everything and is a missionary that goes into this far off place.

And this is the one by which, you know, all other standards are measured. And when you see that, you're like, oh, man, what is my life about? What is it about us that does that sort of thing? You know, is there's something about us in our hearts that we rank ourselves spiritually around other people. And it's natural we all do it.

It's not of the gospel, I'll tell you that. It's not what Jesus wants us to do, I'll tell you that. But it's also this thing about this missionary thing, right? When we look at that, is that the is that the standard? Is that the yardstick by which we should measure ourselves, whether we do these extreme acts of, of mercy and mission?

I have so much respect for people that do that. Because you should because I mean, look at I mean, they've some of these people lay down their lives for Jesus. But I'll tell you this, if they are the yardstick, if we use that as the yardstick, it's a set up for us. And I'll tell you why. Because when I measure myself against someone else's calling in their life, when I begin to create this hierarchy, it's dangerous territories.

Because when I stand next to those yardsticks, they don't tell me anything that I've done right or anything that the Lord's calling me uniquely about my life. What it does is it just shows me where I'm falling short. And it's could be that you're being called to something like that. But when we begin to rank ourselves like that, it becomes a dangerous place.

And no one usually comes out on the other side unscathed. I want to talk about that mission, the missionary, calling a little bit because it's something that, applies to all of us as believers. And one of the reasons I think that we have this, this view of that where we feel so judgment, where I can judgment become judgmental about myself when I see that's when we read the passage.

Matthew 28. Have you ever you know this the Great Commission. It's the last bit of the book of Matthew where Jesus is saying goodbye to his disciples is the Great Commission, where it says, and in verse nine it says, go therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the father and the son, and the Holy Spirit.

There it is right there. It's the command. It says, see, go, go at, go. And you see this on banners and missionary conferences. Go! Exclamation point, I can't go, I got families, I got all these things. What does it mean to go? But the truth of the matter is, when you read that passage, you read a little more closely the command here actually isn't go, actually go in that Bible verse, it's a participle which means nothing to us because we never paid attention in English.

But what a participle means is, while I am going in the course of doing an action, while I am going, and actually the command in that passage is make disciples. So the real imperative there is make disciples. So if I were to read translate that a little bit, what I was saying is, as you are going, as you are going, as you make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the father, son, and the Holy Spirit.

Now why does that matter? Why don't we slow our roll around a passage like that? Because it shifts the emphasis in the implication of something like that, and us understanding what it's saying really matters to how we think about what does it mean to be missional in our lives. It

goes from a command about geography, saying, move to a place where you currently are not going to a region or a direction that you're currently not moving, and it changes it.

It tweaks the command to say that the purpose to I'm sorry, it tweaks the command to say while you are going, the purpose of the movement, that you are already in the place where God has already planted you. I want where God has put you in your life, in your family, in your work, while you are going and what you are already doing.

Make disciples, right? It's not about geography, it's about what we do as we are already set in motion. I don't want you to hear what I'm not saying. I'm not trying to diminish the call of a missionary that moves abroad, I think it's brilliant. And for some of you in this room, you've done it. For some of you, maybe the Lord will stir you and bring you to do that.

But what I'm trying to do here is, is to redefine what it means for us to live life that make to make mission is part of the daily fabric of our lives, of our work, of our families and our communities. And we when we read this and we say, all right, while I am going make disciples, while I am going be a blessing, while I am living into my life.

Serve while I am living. Bare the fingerprints of Jesus on the on the places I'm called to live and serve. That is a hard lens to keep, isn't it? That's a hard heart posture to maintain. Because like I said, we so often want to rank ourselves. We so often want to, think that I'm going forward to do something for Jesus.

And, and I'm always judging where I am in my faith. But when we read this passage just a minute ago, Matthew four, I think this turns the lens a little bit and allows us to see how we can walk in this truth a little better. So what's happening? A little context. Jesus has just been baptized by John the Baptist, and he goes into the wilderness where he's tempted by Satan for a number of days, and he emerges and he's saying, and, he emerges.

And at that point, he hears that John the Baptist has been arrested. And it says here in verse 12, it says, now when he heard that John the Baptist had been arrested, Jesus withdrew

into Galilee. And leaving Nazareth, he went and he lived in Capernaum by the sea and the territory of Zebulun, enough to flee. Now again, this is the beginning of Jesus's ministry.

And the first thing that he does is he goes into Galilee. And we said this last week or the week before talking about what Galilee was. Galilee was this marginal place. It was this place way out in the edges that that, was mixed of Gentiles and Jewish people to the Jewish people, to the Galileans were spiritually polluted.

They were not the spiritually elite. They were corrupt. So the beautiful thing that we see is it's a picture of Jesus's grace. Where does he begin his ministry? He begins it on the margins always. Not with the not with the people that that you that have the spiritual pedigree, but with the people who don't, not with the people who can keep it together, but the people who can't, who probably don't have these spiritual thoughts.

And Jesus begins his ministry there. And why did Jesus go there? Verse 14. So that was what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled the land of Zebulun in the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond, beyond the Jordan, the Galilee of the, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. And what Matthew's doing here is he's quoting Isaiah nine, Isaiah nine.

That's the verse that we always read during Christmas. It's the one that talks about. For unto us a child is born and is given, and it says, on, on, and the government shall be on his shoulders, the government shall be on his shoulders, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, mighty God. A couple of things I want to stop and show you when you read that passage and quoting this, what Matthew is saying is that Jesus is the fulfillment of that prophecy.

So this prophecy that was given 700 years ago, Jesus is stepping on the scene and he is the fulfillment of that prophecy. He is the one that Isaiah nine is talking about. So if that's the case, then what are we saying about Jesus? That that he is he is a coming king, that he is a king and he's not just a normal king.

He is. He has a king who is God and the government, and the authority is upon his shoulders. And so what Matthew's point is this is here is the fulfillment of the prophecy. But whatever

happens and whatever we see that comes from this Jesus who it comes from Jesus next, this is done. It is owned by the King.

It is done by the hand of the king. It is done by the power of the king. And what does the king do? Verse 16, the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light. And for those dwelling in the region in the shadow of death on them a light has dawned. Jesus again is first kingly act.

He steps into the darkness, into the fringes, into the worst parts. Why? Because Jesus knows something. Something that we don't know. Is it? Darkness cannot lift itself. Darkness can't shatter itself. Darkness cannot dissipate itself. The only cure for darkness is light, and the only light in this sense is Jesus. Jesus is stepped into the darkness. Or another way of saying this is Jesus is going on mission.

He's on a mission I want. Don't miss this before Jesus tells anyone to go, before Jesus commands anyone to do anything, he goes before Jesus tells you to be a light in the darkness. He steps in. He is the light in the darkness. Before Jesus calls a disciple, he owns the mission.

He owns the mission. He never tells anyone. He goes, because my father is working until now and I am working. Do you see why this matters? He is the one that's breaking trail. We are not the ones on mission. Let me say this again. You and I are not the ones on mission. Jesus's Jesus is the one on mission.

The King. He's the one that owns it. He's the one that defines the scope of the mission. He is the one that drives it forward. The mission of God is just that. It is the mission of God. This is not a New Testament idea. This is something you see in the first pages of Scripture. When God speaks all of heaven and earth into being, when he's trying to explode his glory, to make this expression of this on this planet that we have of his glory, that we would that everything would transcribe that that is a missional God.

And as he, you know, through all the creation days. And then what does he do with the crown, the crescendo of creation? He makes man and women, and we learn something about God in

that moment when God creates the first man. In the first woman, we learn that one of the inherent parts of God's character is this he loves to share his authority.

God loves to call people in, and he loves to lay his. The responsibilities are his in our lap and say, I want you to work with me. I'm inviting you into this. When he says to Adam, Eve, hey, I want you to exercise dominion. Go out into work. I want you to make you know, you know, cities and trains, you know, take, take the world and turn it into this.

He could have done that on his own. He could have built cities. He could when he said be instead of making them be fruitful, multiply. He could have made much more. A lot of all these people, he could have gathered them in the pockets he wanted. He could have place, place them where he wanted. He could have had them speak the languages he wanted.

He could have had them, you know, develop the kind of art that he wanted. He could have had to develop the type of cuisine he wanted, all those kind of things. But guess what? God didn't want. God didn't want to make a dollhouse, that he would just boop boop boop boop boop boop boop populate with little characters. He created a living, breathing expression of his glory that he shared his authority with.

And he says, I am going on a mission. Will you come with me? So when we read in Matthew chapter four, the same thing is happening here this, this creator God, this, this missional God is now stepping forward. Except this time he is stepping forward on his mission again. He's continuing it. It's not a plan B, it's plan A if it is A, it is a mission of recreation.

It is. It is a message, a mission of redemption. And the very first apostle he's calling them to share in this authority. He's saying, come, will you exercise dominion? Will you be a light like I'm a light? Will you take this light that I'm showing you? And when you carry it into the darkness and build this kingdom of God by being fishers of men.

And it's the same call that he has on our lives, too, right? But before he does any of that, before he allows anyone to step into this role, before they become fishers of men, before they are allowed to heal diseases or proclaim the kingdom, or write Scripture before they could follow

him. Jesus gives him a command, and it's the same command that he's given, giving you the same command he's given me.

And this is a this is a way for us to keep this lens, to understand what it means that Jesus is our mission, and he's called us to follow him. And it's this.

Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Repentance. What does that have to do with mission? I would never think of. Repentance isn't like repentance. When I feel bad about what I've done and I just try to turn away from the sin I've committed in my life is a repentance about making better choices. Yeah, that's true, but it's about so much more what God is saying here, in this, in this moment.

He's calling us to repent again. What he's saying is repentance is this spirit fueled reorientation of our entire lives. It's where I reorient my entire selves, where the Holy Spirit frees me to turn away from self rule, where I can turn and I can submit to Jesus's authority is king. Repentance frees me. It's fueled by the spirit, and it frees me to turn away from my agenda, which is huge.

My agenda, so I can follow what the Lord is doing. Repentance is it, is it? It keeps me, keeps me. It allows me to see the way that I rely on my own power to move the chess pieces around the board, and repentance that frees me to turn and depend on the power of Christ and the Holy Spirit that is moving to move the chess pieces around the board.

This matters because when I am.

Considering what it means to be called on mission, when I reorient and I and I kneel before the living God and Jesus, the first thing I say is this. The first thing I see is this repentance allows me to see that I am the first primary recipient of the mission of Jesus. It's not just what I can do out there, it's what he's done right here.

All that darkness that he stepped in and shattered, all that, all that confusion that he brought. Order two right here. Ground zero, my own heart. The darkness in my life. Guess what? Just like

the darkness said, talk about it in Isaiah nine. It cannot lift itself. And when it came into my own life, it didn't lift itself. It was Jesus at step death.

And in my repentance, I begin to see that. And I was like, I am the. I am the primary recipient of that. You are the primary recipient of that.

Without this, this repentance being missional, even in my own family, what it does to is I don't orient towards Jesus. It always puts me out ahead of Jesus. When I think about being missional in my life, it's about me running ahead trying to accomplish by my agenda what I think should be accomplished. And Jesus is just sitting back there with a clipboard watching me.

That's not the picture of the gospel. Repentance changes everything about my understanding of what it means to go on mission. Jesus is on mission. I'm joining. I'm joining him as part of something that he is already doing. I am following him when he says, follow me. I'm falling in behind him as he is breaking the soil as I step into my daily life, and he is creating these opportunities where I meet people, where I see people.

He is creating these in my normal life where I can, I will. He gives me eyes to see where I can love, where I can serve, where the Holy Spirit is moving before me. Chris Wright, who is a missionalologist. These are guys who study mission. He wrote a book called *Mission to God*, and in his book he talks about when I go on mission, Jesus goes with me.

On mission. He sends me on mission. He goes with me on mission, and he is waiting for me when I'm out. When I arrive to the place I'm going. And the point of this is that when I follow him, I am following a swirl of activity that is already going on. It is not a follow me in a treadmill sort of way.

It's not a follow me. I'm not following Jesus to do more, try harder. It's not about picking up more weight. It's about letting it go. It says that I am not the king. I am not the Savior. I don't have the power. I'm not the one who moves the chess pieces around the board. I'm not the one that changes hearts.

In other words, what it's saying is I am not the Christ Jesus. I am not the Christ. As much as my flesh wants to be. And when I choose to live in the reality of what he's already doing, it changes everything. There was this movie a number of years ago, Michael Douglas movie was called The Game. You remember?

This is a really crazy movie. You put your blood pressure up. But the premise of the game is Michael Douglas. He plays this cold, sort of isolated investment banker, and his brother's really worried about him, and his brother is concerned. He hires his company who designs this game, this immersive game that is, that takes place all of his normal life and in the, you know, in the streets that he lives in.

And the idea is it's this real life game that's meant to transform the hearts and lives of the people that are playing, playing it. And so, as Michael, the game involves this intrigue and betrayal and criminals and car chases and all this. But the thing is, it's played out just in your normal day. So you're walking through, you don't know what's happening and you don't know who's part of the game, and you don't know who's just a person.

You don't know who's been hired and who's doing what. So there's this scene where a couple of things happen and Michael Douglas is tipped off. He realizes the game is afoot, and he's sitting in the airport and he's sitting waiting for an airplane, and somebody makes a comment to him in his ear and, like, runs off into the distance.

And he realizes that who's who, what's going on around me? And all of a sudden, what was just normal life, it becomes animated, it becomes three dimensional, and he's watching it. His perception is changed. What was once flat and just sort of mundane all of a sudden became it took on a depth because you realizes there are things.

There's a story in play that I cannot see. There are things that are happening that are working on me, that I can't see. There are things moving around me that I cannot understand and in his is part of that. Not only did it, did it, did it lighten his life up? Did it make it become exciting? But it changed the lens through which he saw everything?

As Christians, we step into the story and it's swirling around us. God is moving. He's at work. Jesus is weaving together narratives and lines and things that you cannot see. Except our game doesn't end with us being transformed. It begins with it. Yes, we go through a transformation process, but the game that we play begins with us being transformed.

We are transformed when we are made new creations in Christ. They give us the gift of repentance, the gift of faith that we begin to step forward and with his heart of repentance, it reorients our lives and gives us a new lens to see the world a larger, divine missional story that we can't see on our own.

I would encourage you, and we think about this. Where is God planted? You? Where are you now in your life? That just seems kind of flat and mundane. Is it your job? Is it your family? Is it your marriage? Is it your school? Is it your I don't know, but I would encourage you through repentance, through this idea that the Lord went on mission to save you and grabbed you.

And now he has invited you into his story, and he is trying to share this story with you, to lay it in your lap and say, I am sharing my authority with you. I want you to be a part of what I'm doing. What does it mean for us to open our eyes through the power of the Holy Spirit, through prayer, and to say, all right, Lord, today, what do you have for me?

What does it mean for me to be a blessing in this place? What does it mean to display your character to someone who needs it? What does it mean for me to bring order where there's chaos or love, where there's hatred or relationship, where there's brokenness or loneliness? That's the call of us as believers in Christ and through the Holy Spirit and through the gift of repentance, we can step into that.

Amen. Amen.