

THE VISION
“Connecting People to God”
Mark 1:17
New City Church of LA
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I. Introduction

Welcome to New City Church!

- Comment on the new place.
- We are a church in the process of being planted.
- Grand Opening.

We are starting a series on the vision of New City Church. If anyone asks you our vision, here it is: Let’s read it together. [Read together]

- There are two sections: [explain the “be” section and “do” section].
- Today, I want to focus on the first thing we “do”: connect people to God.

II. The Mission

Let’s open up to Mark 1:16-18. This is the story about how the first disciples were called.

16 As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 17 “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you _____”

- Happy, rich, healthy, peaceful, get you a wife, prosper you, free you from your struggles, get you off drugs, give you a better marriage, give you more discipline, make you more holy, make you a better person.
- No, that’s not what he said. Yes, when we follow Jesus,
 - we find the greatest of pleasures in our intimate relationship with him
 - we find that he can heal us, that he can give us peace, that he can prosper us beyond material riches, that he can liberate us from the bondage of sin

- we find that he can give us more discipline, he can change our hearts, and that he can make us into a better person

But, what Jesus said was, follow me, and I will make you *fishers of men*. What? It's kind of interesting that none of us started a relationship with God because we wanted to be fishers of men. Most of us started (or came back to Chris as an adult) because we needed him, we felt empty and we found that he filled the desires of our hearts. As we become a follower of Jesus, as we become lovers of Jesus Christ, engaging in an intimate relationship with him, we find that he send us out.

A Christian life is not JUST about finding peace with God, finding his blessings in our lives, experiencing the power of his love, grace, and the gospel in OUR lives. It's not even creating a beautiful community where we love one another, care for one another, or become authentic and real to one another. It is also about going fishing. It's about other people as well. A Christian life is not **just** about our own happiness, but **also** about caring and reaching others for Christ. The bible always combines the inner and the outer together. When we have an inner blessing and relationship, he calls us to go.

In this passage, Jesus says to follow me (enter into an intimate relationship with him) and I will make you into fishers of men (he gives us a mission that's about others, not just about ourselves).

God is saying, before I met you, when you were being your own savior, it was understandable that you were self absorbed. Now, that I have saved you and liberated you, you have absolutely no excuse. Go! I am sending you. Live for others! As Paul says in Ephesians 2:10:

“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

You were created with a purpose! There are particular things God planned for you to do.

Even your joy, sorrow, gender, gift mix, experience—they are all there so that you can meet the needs of someone that God wants you to meet.

The reigning worldview now is that: you are not here for any purpose. We are just thrown into the world. We are a product of randomness. Jesus says, your life is more than about just eating, drinking, living, and dying. It's more than about success in

your career or even in your relationships. It is about fulfilling the mission that God has given you.

Right before Jesus ascended into Heaven, he commanded his disciples and said this (in Matt 28:19)

Therefore go and 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.

That's God's final directive to us. It is to make disciple. It is to be fishers of men. The inner love relationship with God is only a part of his intent for us. He wants us to help other people by bringing them into a relationship with God. That is the greatest service we can do for others. It changes eternal destiny of people. Every thing in this world is temporary. But, God and people are eternal and God wants us to help change the eternal destinies of people. That's our mission. That's the vision. We convey that by saying we connect people to God. [a story of how eternal things came to matter more than millions of dollar changing hands in the cases I was working on]

III. The Message

Mark 1:14, a couple of verses before the passage we read earlier, says:

14 After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news (gospel) of God. 15 "The time has come, he said, "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"

What Jesus preached was the good news (the gospel—*euagellion*) that the kingdom of God is near. And what Jesus taught us to preach was the same.

- In Luke 9:2, Luke tells us that Jesus sent his 12 disciples on a mission trip and told them to preach the good news of the kingdom of God. (BTW, to preach the good news is not about preaching to people that they need to live righteous lives—that's what the prophets of the OT preached, but what Jesus preached is something entirely different) He preached that God has incarnated (meaning become man) to rescue us. That's a part of what it means that the kingdom of God is near you. A relationship with God is near you. Salvation is near you.

Why? Because God has become man and entered into the world to rescue the world.

- Then in Luke 10:9, Jesus sends out 72 disciples on a mission trip, and he told them to tell the good news that the kingdom of God is near you.
- Then, right before he ascended he told us to make disciples of all nations, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. What did he command his disciples to do? Preach the good news of the Kingdom of God.
- The bottom line: Every single disciple of Jesus is given a message and told to publicly communicate it and urge others to receive it.
- This is really a hot issue. A lot of people say: it's alright that they believe in Jesus but they should not try to convince other people. You shouldn't try to convert people.
- But, Jesus sent us out to present the gospel. What does this word mean? It had a special meaning. A gospel was news of objective history changing event. There is a statement in the ancient writing that reads: "This is the gospel of Caesar Augustus." His birth changed the course of history, the declaration says.
- In BC 490. Persians were invading Athens. Everyone expected the Persians to win. But, Athenians won. Because something incredibly historical happened. The history book tells us that a person ran from the battle to Athens, about 26 miles, and declared the gospel (*euaggelion*) of victory—this objective news of history changing event! And then he collapsed and died. The battle is the Battle of Marathon.
- The message of Jesus is not advice. It is **news** of an objective event that has happened or is happening. Advice is what you should do, how you should live, and stuff like that. But, the gospel is a declaration of a fact. That God has come to save us and initiated the Kingdom of God and opened the doors to it.
- When a person says, it's okay to believe in Jesus, but you shouldn't try to convert anyone, he is saying you can't believe in the gospel as objective news that Jesus Christ is God incarnate. You can't believe in him as the creator of the world incarnate!

- Because if the creator of the world has come to live with us, this is big news! To hide this news would be wicked. It would be like hiding the cure for AIDS. To know that Jesus is not just a prophet but God and not to say anything would be wicked!
- In addition, to say that you shouldn't tell other people about Jesus is to say that your view of the universe is what we should adopt. Your view is that no one has the truth and anyone who claims to have the truth should stop trying to convince other people of the truth because no one has the truth or because everyone has the truth.
- This claim that no one should make an absolute truth claim is an absolute truth claim. This is one view of the universe that's popular now. It is a Western European Post-Enlightenment claim. You are saying that your view, the relativistic view of the world is the correct one. The point I am trying to make is that everyone is making a truth claim. To say stop it is to do it.

But, the problem is that so many people who do make absolute truth claims are being narrow minded and destructive. I think that what's behind the criticism. The logic of the criticism is questionable because the asserted position is the exact position that they are trying to refute. However, the criticism that people who tend to make truth claims are intolerant and narrow minded are true. But, as I said, everyone is making truth claims. How do we do so in a way that is not destructive but respectful?

IV. The Motivation.

I think the answer is our motivation. What motivates us to convince other people about Jesus Christ?

If you go to one of the passages we looked at, the passage about Jesus sending 72 disciples to preach the good news of the Kingdom of God in Luke 10. I want to look deeper into that passage and see what Jesus told them after they came back. There is something very crucial about what he said. Let's catch the story from Luke 10:17ff:

17The seventy-two returned with joy and said, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name."

18He replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. 19I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. 20However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

They came back really excited about what happened. They said, even the demons submit to us in your name! And Jesus is excited too. He said, he saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Amazing statement: when we preach the good news, it is an offensive against Satan in the spiritual realm. He also wanted us to understand that he has given us the power to overcome the spiritual enemy.

Then, he says something really interesting.

Jesus warns them in verse 20: "However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you." What's wrong with rejoicing that the spirits submit to us? It's saying that, hey, they submit to us, WE ARE SOMEBODY. WE'RE SOMETHING ELSE! Jesus said, don't rejoice because of that. You're getting the sense that you are somebody based on this. If you say, this is how I know I am somebody—in performance. I am somebody because I am helping people. I am somebody because I can bring people to Jesus. I am somebody because I am a visionary church planter. I am somebody because people see the power of God in me. If you are doing this because you want to be somebody, you will be manipulative to people. When people reject you, you get threatened by them because your very identity is at stake. And you start to use pressure tactics. This is what people are seeing and criticizing.

But, Jesus said, "but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." The gospel is that your name IS WRITTEN (past tense) in heaven. Every religion of the world says if you do this and that, your name will be written in heaven. But, Jesus said, your name is written (already written) in heaven. Because **the gospel is: don't rejoice in what you do; rejoice in what you are already.** When we are motivated by the gospel, we are not going to manipulate anyone. We are going to be guided by the Holy Spirit. We are going to love them as Christ loved them. We will never make anyone an evangelism project. We will love them whether or not they believe. But, at the same time, we are going to declare the good news of Jesus Christ. We will never think that we are better than them. Because we are not. We are as messed up as anyone else. Because the good

news does not have anything to do with our ethical standing, but it has to do with what God has done to rescue us from the pit that we were in. So, we are humble. Yet, we are confident because we know that our names are written in heaven. It's not based on what we have done, but it is based on what Jesus has already done on the cross.

You see, God loved us so much, that he came to this world in the person of Jesus Christ, inaugurated the kingdom of God, and live life as we should lived and died the death that we should have died, so that we might enter into the kingdom and fulfill the mission that God has given us.

V. Application

- God called us into his inner chambers and sends us out to live our lives for others! And the most important way we live our lives for others is by sharing the gospel.
- And that's what our church is about. We connect people to God. That's why we want to reach as many people as we can through the Grand Opening. That's why we pray for a revival. It's much easier to have a church that takes care of people who are believers and allow people outside of our church to do their own thing. The reality is that so many churches take this view intentionally or unintentionally. But, we are called to become fishers of men and women.
 - We've got to do everything possible to reach the people in downtown LA with the gospel of Jesus Christ.
 - We've got to do everything possible to reach people who do not have a relationship with God to know that God has broken into history and provided a way to be liberated from their own pit.
 - We've got to do everything possible to change the eternal destinies of people around us.
 - If we love them, is there anything more important?
 - I believe God is calling people to give their lives to follow Jesus and become fishers of men and women. Are you willing to give your life?
 - Are you willing to give to others as Christ gave to you?

The Parable of the Crude Lifesaving Station

On a dangerous seacoast where shipwrecks often occur there was once a crude lifesaving station. The building was just a hut, and there was only one boat, but the few devoted members kept a constant watch over the sea, and with no thought for themselves went out day and night tirelessly searching for the lost. Many lives were saved by this wonderful little station, so that it became famous. Some of those who were saved, and various others in the surrounding area, wanted to become associated with the station and give of their time and their money and their effort for the support of its work. New boats were bought and new crews were trained. The little lifesaving station grew.

Now some of the members of the lifesaving station became unhappy, in time, however, because the building was so crude and so poorly equipped. They felt that a more comfortable, suitable place should be provided as the first refuge of those saved from the sea. And so they replaced the emergency cots with beds, and they put better furniture in the now enlarged building, so that now the lifesaving station actually became a popular gathering place for its members. They took great care in decorating it beautifully and furnishing it exquisitely, for they found new uses for it in the context of a sort of club. But fewer members were now interested in going to sea on lifesaving missions, and so they hired lifesaving crews to do this work on their behalf, and in their stead. Now, don't misunderstand, the lifesaving motif still prevailed in the club's decoration and symbols — there was a liturgical lifeboat (symbolic rather than fully functional) in the room where the club initiations were held, for example — so the changes did not necessarily mean that the original purposes were totally lost.

About this time a large ship was wrecked off the coast, and the hired crews brought in boatloads of cold and wet, half-drowned people. They were dirty people and they were sick people, some of them with black skin, some with yellow skin. The beautiful new club, as you might imagine, was thrown into chaos, so that the property committee immediately had a shower house built outside the club where these recent victims of shipwreck could be cleaned up before coming inside the main clubhouse.

At the very next meeting, there was a split in the club membership. Most of the members wanted to stop the club's lifesaving activities for being so unpleasant, as well as for being a hindrance to the normal social life of the club. Some members insisted upon lifesaving as their primary purpose, pointing out that, indeed, they were still called a lifesaving station. But these few were finally voted down and told that if they wanted to save the lives of all the various kinds of people who were shipwrecked in those waters, they could begin their own lifesaving station down the coast. And so, they did just that.

Now as the years passed, the new station down the coast came to experience the very same changes that had occurred in the older, initial station. It evolved into a club, and yet another lifesaving station had to be founded to restore the original purpose.

Well, history continued to repeat itself, so that if you visit that seacoast today, you will find a great number of exclusive clubs along that shore. Shipwrecks are frequent in those waters, but most of the people drown!”

PRAYER: five people in their lives that do not have a relationship with God.