

Connecting People to Christ
Matt 4:23-25, Luke 14:25-33, Psalm 24

Brothers and sisters in Christ, this morning we are learning about how to keep the blessing going beyond what we have done for people by blessing them in Jesus name with \$100 we need to see how blessing leads to discipleship, and begin to understand that discipleship is a blessing.

Remember back in Genesis, when God made the Covenant of Promise to Abraham – what did God say? Well not just once but three times God says “all nations will be...BLESSED.”

So its not just a coincidence that when Jesus fulfills all the O.T. covenants, He then tells his disciples to go and make disciples of all nations – that’s the blessing in the promise to Abraham.

So, this is why as we are going about blessing people, the only caveat that we have for it is that we do it in the name of Jesus, because if blessing people leads into discipleship then this is part of how we set-up the blessing to continue and create an opportunity where we can connect people to Christ.

Now I also know that it’s tempting to think that our job of connecting people to Christ would have been so much easier if we could have introduced people to Jesus while He was engaged in His ministry, physically present here on earth over in the land of Palestine.

Because when we read through the gospels there are so many instances where we read about how people came from all over to see Jesus and to receive ministry from him.

The passage we read this morning in Matt 4:23-25, is a good summary of what this typically looked like. Word of Jesus’ healing ministry “goes viral” and people from all over bring those who are sick or possessed to him in order to be healed.

Large crowds gathered to hear Jesus teach as well. In Matt we have the crowds listening to Jesus teach and when he finished this teaching session the scriptures says that the crowds of people “*were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.*” (Mat 7:28-29)

Word of mouth spreads, and wherever Jesus is, people seek him out and they bring along those who need Jesus... remember the story of the paralyzed friend whose friends couldn't get into the house where Jesus was teaching so they went up onto the roof-top and made a hole in the ceiling in order to lower their paralyzed friend down in front of Jesus so Jesus could heal him. (Mark 2:1-5)

But, brothers and sisters IN Christ, is actually easier to connect people to Christ after Pentecost than it was when Jesus was physically on earth, there is no need to go anywhere to get to Jesus... we don't have to spend a day traveling over to the next town or village or dig our way through a roof!

Through the Holy Spirit we have direct access to the risen and glorified and ascended Lord Jesus Christ in Heaven and we can connect people to Him anytime and anyplace through our presence and through prayer in His name.

When we see people's spiritual thirst and their needs, we can bring them to Christ by sharing how Christ met our spiritual

thirst and needs and we can bring them to Christ through bringing their needs to Him in prayer – in His name.

That is a very specific way we can keep the blessing going... towards discipleship, connecting people to Christ through testimony and prayer, and because of the work of the Holy Spirit it is actually easier to do than when Jesus was on earth.

But the blessing needs to keep going and transform and develop into discipleship. The fullness of being connected to Christ means someone grows to know Jesus as more than a miracle worker who helps us out when nothing else seems to work.

Discipleship helps us become aware that there is a far greater blessing that being connected to Christ is preparing us for. The initial blessings we receive from Christ are only just a foretaste of what it to come – but in order to receive it we need to be made fit for it – and we must realize that this sanctification and change in our lives is also a blessing.

Jesus himself had to confront the crowds of people who followed Him about this.

Thus we hear Him say to the people whom he was blessing with healings and miracles *“If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple. And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.”* (Luke 14:26-27)

Strong words to our ears friends, but let us not get hung up on the hyperbole about hating our own family or our own life and miss Jesus’ message that connecting to Him is about much more than what we can get out of it for our family members or for ourselves... instead fully connecting to Jesus also means we will give up things and sacrifice in order to follow Him, and though we may not realize it just yet – there is blessing in that.

That’s certainly another discipleship nudge for each of us to consider isn’t it... As we bless others and keep the blessing going – towards discipleship, are we seeing the blessing for

ourselves in following Jesus for more than what we can get out of Him? That’s why last week as we learned about credibility in our connections, we learned about the importance of suffering for it – that proves we’re not in it just because we benefit from it.

But how do we keep the blessing going towards discipleship for those people whom we are connecting and are building credibility with? How do we work to fully connect them to Christ with a goal of discipleship?

Or to put it another way – How do any of us grow from connecting to Christ as a miracle worker who helps us with our problems to connecting with Him as the Messiah for whom we will put up with problems? Do you understand what I mean?

How can we teach them that Christ is the Word incarnate, help them understand how His incarnation means He is their substitute and provides forgiveness for their unfaithfulness...

Do they even know they have been unfaithful to the Covenant and thus need a substitute?

Where can we teach them how to live everyday by having faith in their everyday substitute and actually get them connected through the Holy Spirit to Jesus Christ?

And how will they know what the proper response is when they receive the Holy Spirit and all of who Jesus Christ is through that?

Knowing and learning to live by such teachings are further blessings brothers and sisters – blessings that make up what it means to be a disciple.

And there are many important blessings like these in being disciples brothers and sisters, and we can't skip out on them or be reductionistic about them by saying things like *"well, the most important about following Jesus is... your relationship with God etc..."*

Think about it for a moment. When Jesus told us what it would mean to bless all nations by discipling them he said do this by *"teaching them to obey everything I commanded you"* (Matt 18:20) not... 'summarize everything I commanded you into a simplistic phrase that says everything and nothing at the same time.'

So – brothers and sisters – when it comes blessing people in Jesus' name towards discipleship and helping people become fully connected to Christ, there are a number of different ways that we can attempt to do this and cover all the bases.

But as I have reflected on it and studied about it and looked at it, I believe this happens best and most consistently when people are engaged in worshiping Jesus... so we can help connect them to Christ in this way by inviting them to come and worship Jesus alongside us.

Now – at the moment, with pandemic circumstances being what they are, and how God has given us this blessing project, the emphasis is on us going out to connect with

people in order to bless them, but... as we do that remember... that initial blessing can be used to create the opportunity later on – at the right time – to connect people to Christ by inviting them to worship Jesus.

We go out – to bless, and we invite people in – to be blessed.

Now, there are other ways to do it – but for us at Valleyview the blessing of discipleship is centered in regular worship of Jesus.

So let's take a scriptural look at how this happens and how this helps to connect people to Christ – by looking at what scripture has to say about worship in Psalm 24.

So Ps 24:1-2 says *“The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters.”*

These two verses give us the Reason why there is such a thing that we call Worship.

If we were to read it in the Hebrew we would notice that the words translated as “founded” and “established” are common construction words used to describe the building of temples. So what this Psalm is saying is that the whole world was created by God, identified with his covenant name Yahweh, to be a temple.

And what happens within a temple? You worship the one whose temple it is – Yahweh the Covenant God who created us and whose creatures we are, and we use what Yahweh has created by His Word – the earth and everything in it- to worship Him. *(This is why we do Green worship series)*

That is worship at its broadest and truest definition brothers and sisters, and when we understand and engage in this by gathering together on each Sunday morning something important happens in Connecting people – ourselves included - to Christ

It puts God, Yahweh, in His rightful place as the Creator who is in a Covenant relationship with His creatures and creation –

and puts us in our rightful place as His creatures who are in Covenant with Him, and it reveals to us that this reality has come about and is still exists because of God's Word – Jesus Christ.

So this connects us to Christ as the creating and sustaining Word of God and helps us understand that in following Him we are creatures who follow their Creator – and that has huge implications for our self-understanding and how we live our day to day lives.

The Wisdom books of the bible, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, and Job are all about how to honor the Creator by living wisely and skillfully in His creation. So a disciple of Jesus connects to Him as Creator by being obedient to God's designs and intentions for His creation – and blessing results from this.

That is something that should be occurring in your life because of regular participation in Sunday worship... If only because it reflects the created order of working six days and taking Sabbath on the seventh.

And let's be honest that our work and all our recreational activities that we engaged in can often hinder our progress in growing as disciples and making them – because our lives are centered on them and they get all our time and energy and engagement. In short they have become idols.

And Ps 24:4 asks the rhetorical question in vs 3 *“Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place?”* and then points out that when we *“trust in an idol or swear by a false god”* we are disqualified from coming before our Creator to worship him because we are unfaithful covenant partners who are worshipping something else that was created - instead of our creator.

Only *“one who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not trust in an idol or swear by a false god.”* May come into the presence of God the Creator to worship Him.

So brothers and sisters, we are blessed through such confession in worship as it drives home the reality that no one

has clean hand or a pure heart when it comes to idolatry and worshipping false gods...

The only reason we are able to come into God Almighty's presence in worship of Him is because of Christ as the one who fulfills the requirements for Covenant faithfulness of clean hand and no idolatry - on our behalf.

Worship connects people to Christ as the Covenant substitute – through whom we worship God!

As we grow to understand and accept this brothers and sisters we are blessed as disciples. We go from being church attendees who come out when they have a free Sunday morning because it "feels inspiring" or "we like the music" or we "get a lot out of the message" to true worshipers who are being blessed to encounter God through Jesus.

And brothers and sisters – this is what changes us to become people - disciples who will take up their cross and follow Jesus because He is the only way we can connect to our Creator

who is our source of life. We know that blessing can not be found anywhere else.

And so connecting to God through Jesus Christ in Worship is worth giving up our Sunday mornings for, it is worth telling our kids that worship comes first and sports or birthday parties come second... it is worth finding another gathering of fellow Christians to worship with when you are away on business or vacation, and all the AV challenges to meet during a time of pandemic.

Do you know these blessings in worship brothers and sisters? When you go out to bless others in Jesus name – may it be a first step in helping them come to know further blessings such as these in worship later on.

And Psalm 24 specifically talks about worship as something through which God blesses and rewards us.

Let's look at vs 6 where it says *"Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek your face, God of Jacob"*

Now what's important to note here is that God is called the God of Jacob.

If you remember anything about Jacob, you may remember how he schemed and cheated and worked very hard in life in order to make something of himself, if you read from Genesis 25 to 35 you will find plenty of examples of this...

But if there is a trait which stands out in Jacob, it is the way in which he related to Yahweh as someone whom He needed to be clever with, or bargain with, or wrestle with in order to secure the blessings - which God had already promised to give Him.

So to say that blessing and vindication come from the God of Jacob is to say that God has already chosen to bless in spite of behavior that does not deserve it – and that there is no human effort with regards to cleverness, or bargaining or even striving and wrestling with God that secures that blessing for us. That is entirely of God's own sovereign choosing.

And people need to be connected to Christ as God's sovereign Choice to give us all the covenant blessings promised to Abraham (and to all the other covenants figures) and to vindicate us against the accusation that we do not deserve such blessings because of our unfaithfulness.

In other words, when people are connecting with Christ through worship they are blessed in Him because God has chosen Christ, and not because they've convinced God to reward them for good behavior or for doing what is right and so on... or for sacrificing their time to come to worship.

Engaging in Worship through the acts of tithing/giving and through celebrating the Lord's Supper blesses us and makes disciples who are realizing more and more that its actually Christ who has connected to us - and any response on our part is gratitude, and not cleverness, or bargaining.

Worship connects you to Christ as God's conduit and source for His blessings. There is no need to wrestle with God for any assurance of forgiveness and if you will be a part of the new

heavens and the new earth that Christ will establish when He returns. And that leads us to the ultimate blessings in worship according to Ps 24, anticipating the return of the King.

In the ancient world when a King would come, a city would open its gates to receive him and welcome him and so Psalm 24:7 and 9 repeat this exhortation to welcome the King. *“Lift up your heads, you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in.”*

When we gather to worship, everything we do is centered around Jesus as He connects us to God and empowers us with His Holy Spirit and participating in that helps people to connect to Christ as the King, as the center of their lives, as the one who has the right to command them and have their allegiance.

But even more than that friends, vs. 8, 10 say that the King of Glory is Yahweh who is strong and mighty in battle.

This implies a clash of kingdoms, it implies a city that has been captive held by hostile powers that have been defeated and the city is set free and opens the gates to welcome in the King who has defeated the occupiers.

So participating in worship also connects us to Christ the Conqueror, and blesses us with freedom and turns us into disciples whose loyalties and allegiances to the powers of this world are changing and shifting over to the Kingdom of God.

And it makes us ambassadors and who announce Christ’s impending return where, as it says in Rev 11:15 *“The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever.”*

And the good thing about how worship blesses us as disciples by connecting us and others to Christ in all these various ways is that it’s not just a one shot deal – it’s something that happens week after week, year after year over the course of someone’s life.

The more we engage in worship, the more we are blessed, and the more we help those we are discipling to engage in worship - connecting them to Christ as Creator, as Covenant substitute, as God's Choice to bless us, and as the Center of our lives and the Conqueror who brings in God's Kingdom – the more they are blessed.

That's why worship is at the heart of what we do at Valleyview and as we are currently being sent out to bless others during a time when worship has been... shifted – we need to understand how we are to keep the blessing going in anticipation of when our worship opportunity is able to shift back, and will have been expanded in our ability to include people online in the future – there has never been an easier way to invite people to worship alongside us now – and be blessed in doing so.

So, keep on praying about who to go out and bless in Jesus name with the blessing project. As you do this, use this as an opportunity to connect with people the community. Build credible connections with them, and follow the promptings of

the Holy Spirit to connect them to Christ – because they will be blessed even more as they become His disciples through worshipping Him.

There is so much more to blessing people than giving them \$100 in Jesus name brothers and sisters – and I hope you can see in the same way that this blessing comes from understanding how worship is so much more than just one hour on Sunday morning with some songs and a message...

Let's keep the blessing going and connect people to Christ by inviting them to worship Him. Amen