

Who in this room,
is best situated to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to the world?

Who is in the ideal setting
to be able to reach people
who need to hear that Jesus offers new life
and freedom from the bondage of sin?

Is it your pastor?

Is it your train worker?

Is it your hospitality person?

Is it your Park Service Employee?

Why would you say that that person
has a more ideal setting than you
to proclaim the gospel?

Paul uses the examples of slave or free
and circumcised or uncircumcised
to say that no matter your situation,
God can use you just as you are.
You do not need to change your job,
your marital status,
your financial situation,
in order to preach God's love.

God's love doesn't change
if you are a millionaire
or on food stamps.

God's redemptive love doesn't do anything more for you
if you are single
or if you have a family of 9.

The effectiveness of God's call is not altered
if you are the business owner
or the janitor.

No matter your situation,
no matter your current calling,
no matter where you find yourself,
God can use you right where you are at.

This is news that the Corinthians needed to hear
and we need to hear.

The Corinthians were looking at ways to improve their social status in the church.

We dealt with one of those ways last week,
as people were trying to either shed their spouse to be more Holy
or resist the God given calling they had to their spouse,
in order to show their faithfulness
and commitment to the faith.

It was impressive dedication.

The only problem being,
it doesn't effect the fact that Jesus already died for you
and was raised to life for for you.

We will hear next week
that being single does not help our status with Christ either.

Whether single or married,
we are still beloved Children of God.

Our social situation has no influence on God's ability to work in and through us.

We need to hear that,
because we are always looking for ways to improve our situation,
to live life better.

We also always have a reason
as to why we can't do what God calls us to do.

If only I had blank,
then I could really make a difference in God's Kingdom.

The blanks range all over the map.

More money,
more time,
different friends,
more confidence,
higher education,
less responsibilities,
less gray hairs,
better health,
bigger home,
less worldly possessions,
more courage,
fewer people to care for,
or if I were not so important,
then I could really make a difference in God's Kingdom.

If there is anything I missed,
it probably falls into the same category.
If we were called to Christ while we were a broke single person,
we do not need to become a rich married person
before we can live out that faith.
If we were an unbelieving couple,
we don't need to divorce our spouse
that did not see the light when we did,
in order to become a real follower of Jesus Christ.
Jesus can use us in our home situation to proclaim the gospel
just as much as he can in our work situation.

Paul uses the illustrations of circumcision and slavery
to make his point.
The closest thing I can think of for us
is jail.
As we are aware,
a number of people in the world
have found Jesus while in the state penitentiary,
or even the local jail house.
The question is,
do they wait to be released
before they start living out this new freedom
and life in Christ?
Do you hear the prisoner tell the parole board,
“While I have been in prison,
I have found Jesus.”
To which they ask,
“Oh really,
what has changed about your life.”
And the prisoner responds,
“Well nothing yet.
I am just a prisoner,
there is nothing I can do in here.
But when I get out,
I will start doing all kinds of good things.”

When someone finds Jesus in prison,
they do not wait to get out,
they do not wait to move up the ladder socially,
before they start responding to this new life.
They are aware that they can react to Jesus now
and live that new life now.

Of course,
they will be like the slave,
who if freed,
will take that freedom
and now be a freedman in Christ.
They would be foolish to say,
“Thank you for the offer,
but I prefer the limitations of this setting.
I will stay in jail for awhile longer.”

Paul doesn't want us,
nor does Jesus want us to do that.
If our settings change,
Jesus can still use us.
He might even be moving us to a different place
to use us more than he has been.
Or in a new and different way.
But no matter what situation we find ourself in,
we have the opportunity to be used by God
to share the gospel.

Paul did some of his greatest work in the confines of chains.
He also did glorious things while free.
He was effective when healthy
and effective when ill.
He was ready to serve God,
no matter the circumstances.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a brilliant theologian in Germany,
influenced American thinking during a few years in New York,
inspired Young Christians in Europe,
a mentor to many upcoming preachers while in hiding in the Alps,
and converted guards while they held him prisoner.

He, like Paul,
did not let the circumstances change how he lived out Jesus' calling to be his follower.

Whatever your circumstances,
Jesus can use you.

So in answer to my original question,

“Who is the best situated to proclaim the gospel to the world?”
the answer is
everyone.

We could waste oxygen debating who is best educated,
who interacts with the most people,
who's personality is the most like-able and engaging.

We could run through the different health factors
that would make us likely or unlikely candidates,
young or old,
active or inactive,
male or female,
children or no children,
our blood pressure,
our patience,
our smile.

But all of this would be a waste of time.

For no matter what your circumstances are or were,
Jesus still called you to be his brother or sister.
Jesus still offered his life for yours.
Jesus has still set you free.

Whatever your situation you find yourself in today,
Jesus can use that to build up his kingdom.

For many of us,
that looks very different
from when we first accepted that call,
for others
not much has changed.

For me,
my calling,
my official commitment to Christ
happened under a pine tree
next to Flathead Lake in Montana
at a church camp in 5th grade.

Thankfully not everything has stayed the same.
I have regained my coordination
and have fewer zits,
and about 60 more pounds.

But I shared Jesus from then on,
in all kinds of circumstances.

For it was not the circumstances that determined who Jesus was,
it is Jesus
who determines who Jesus is
and what he wants us to be and do.

So if he wants to move you to Spokane for college,
then Vancouver, WA to substitute teach,
then Boise, Idaho to teach gifted and talented elementary students,
then Vancouver British Columbia for Seminary,
before Skagway, Alaska,
he can.

It does not matter where,
because I am "in Christ"
no matter where in the world I find myself.

I encourage you to go out from here,
ready to live in Christ,
with no,
"If only I were..." holding you back.

Do not go chasing the perfect situation
before you are ready to live in Christ.

There will always be a new,
"If only I were..." to deal with.

Jesus did not start his ministry with,
"If only you are blank,
repent for the kingdom of God has come near."

There were no descriptors to delineate who should repent.

There were no status levels to achieve,
for we are all already God's creation.

The offer was open to all to repent,
for the Kingdom of God has come near.

God used me as a single pastor
and he is now still using me as a married pastor.

I know the temptation to want to put limits on what we can do,
until God meets our needs and desires.

Blackmailing God to get what we want is a popular option in the world.

But it is pure foolishness,

because God has already given us everything we need and more.

We just need to use it.

Go and use it,

because Christ has died,

Christ has risen,

Christ will come again.