

Making Disciples: Our Holy Commission  
Matthew 28:18-20

What is the purpose of your life? In the past few weeks I have been striving to stress one aspect of the purpose of the Christian's life is to live worthy of their calling (Eph. 4:1). The Christian is to live a holy life separated from the world and unto God (1 Peter 3:18). Their mind is to be set on things above and not on the things of this earth (Col. 3:2). They set their minds to think about what is good, honorable, just, pure, lovely, of good report, things that are virtuous, and praiseworthy (Phi. 4:8). The Christian is to be a living and holy sacrifice to God that is not being conformed to this world, but being transformed by the renewing of their mind that they may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect (Romans 12:1,2). By living in this manner, the Christian brings glory to God and will prove themselves to be useful in His service.

It is being useful to God's service that I want to talk to you about this morning. If God's call to us to walk worthy of our calling involved just being sanctified to Him, then being cloistered in a monastery would be the ideal life. There would be a great advantage to living in a manner in which we would have little to no interaction with "worldly" people. But we will not find that God tells us to do that anywhere in the Bible.

God does not want us to love the evil system that is in operation in the world nor are we to desire the things the world has to offer (1 John 2:15,16), but we are to love all the people of the world and not shun them (Mt. 5:43-48). We are to be separated from worldly practices ourselves, but we are to reach out to those that are practicing those things with the gospel of Jesus Christ. We are to live holy lives and prove ourselves useful to God's service on this earth by engaging those who are living sinful lives and calling them to join us in receiving forgiveness for sin through Jesus Christ and then walking with Him. God has called us to Himself that we might be holy and He has given to us a holy commission to call help others do the same. But who can God use to fulfill this holy commission?

#### PEOPLE GOD CAN USE

Jesus' disciples were just ordinary men. There was really nothing special about them. They were often proud, boastful and selfish - even bickering with each other about who was the greatest (Mt. 20:20f). They often demonstrated a lack of faith - even over things Jesus had previously done before them (Mt. 15:32f). They proved to be fearful and except for John, refused to be seen & identified with Jesus after He was arrested and was crucified. Even after the resurrection, they were initially hesitant to believe. These were ordinary men, who were really no different from us. Yet, in Acts 17:6, their opponents said they "turned the world upside down."

AVAILABLE: God was able to use these ordinary men because they made themselves available to God, they were worshipful to Jesus and they submitted to Him. God can use us in a similar way if these characteristics would mark our lives. Jesus told the disciples to meet Him in Galilee. Verse 16 tells that they went there. They wanted to be available for whatever the Master had in store for them. You find that to be true throughout their lives. They often did not know what was in store for them, but they desired to learn from Jesus whatever He would teach them and they desired to do whatever Jesus would ask them. They made themselves available.

Are you available? I believe that a major reason that many Christians are not used much by the Lord is simply the fact that they have entrapped themselves so much into what the world says is important,

that they are not available to do what the Lord says is important. We mimic society and rush from place to place to accomplish this or that with the result that we often never see the opportunities that are right in front of us. The neighbor that needs encouragement. The co-worker that would join us in a Bible study if we asked them. The teen that would like for someone to give them something to believe in, but doesn't believe that anyone really cares. In the rat race to keep up with the Jones and fulfill society's goal of materialistic success, we miss the opportunities to meet genuine needs both close at hand and far away.

What soaks up your time, energy and money? Would you be able to take advantage of an opportunity to do something for the Lord even if it were handed to you on a silver platter, or are you like the rat so busy trying to get through the maze to the end that you never look up to see the hand of God offering you a way out to a different kind of life? Are you available to God?

**WORSHIPFUL:** The disciples were also moved to worship at the presence of Jesus Christ. Verse 17 says that when they saw Jesus they fell down and worshiped Him. That requires an understanding of who He is and who you are in relationship to Him. If that thought alone does not make you fall down before Him, then you think too highly of yourself and too low of Him. You are simply one of the things He has created. You deserve nothing but punishment because of your sin, yet He has chosen to love you and give you everything. Worship of the Lord Jesus Christ is at the heart of the true Christian. Is that true of you?

Ministry done without a heart of worship is always done in the flesh without the Spirit's power. It also always becomes that person's personal source of pride and/or power. Such ministry is not unto the Lord for His sake, but unto themselves for their own sake.

**SUBMISSIVE:** We also find that the disciples were submissive to Jesus. They understood that He is Lord and willingly sought to obey Him. They did not obey because they had to, but because they wanted to. That also is a difference between a true & false Christian.

## JESUS' AUTHORITY

Jesus states in verse 18 that *"All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth."* Jesus' claim here is unlimited. Authority refers to Jesus' right, power and freedom to do as He pleases and command others to do as He pleases. Jesus' claim here is that this authority has been given to Him by the Father and that it encompasses everything. The word, "all," and the phrase, "heaven and earth," reinforce each other in expressing the idea that Jesus has authority over all created things.

It is Jesus' right to command us. It is our responsibility to obey. Failure to obey subjects us to either His chastisement (Heb. 12) or His wrath and judgement (Rom. 1:18, Rev. 20). Those that fail to yield will eventually be forced to obey (Eph 4). The true Christian is marked by submission which is willing obedience, not defiance which results in forced obedience.

Jesus has the authority to command and he does so in verse 19. It is important that you understand that what Jesus says here is a command, not a suggestion. It is expected that those that belong to Christ will obey it. It is ludicrous for someone to say that they believe Jesus' claims and trust Him for salvation and then reject what He says and not submit to His authority. That only proves they do not believe Jesus' claims about Himself, and one of His claims is authority over all creation.

## JESUS' COMMAND TO MAKE DISCIPLES

What is the command that Jesus gives? It is one command accomplished in three elements. The Greek grammar here is one verb, "make disciples," with three participles: "going," "baptizing," & "teaching." We are to "make disciples" by "going," "baptizing" and "teaching."

The command is not arbitrary but based on Jesus Himself. Notice the command begins with a "therefore" which brings back into focus Jesus' authority. The command to make disciples can be

fulfilled because Jesus has the authority to send us and the power to accomplish His work through us. As I have said before, it is not your ability, but your availability given in worshipful submission that makes you useful to God. Jesus accomplishes His work through you. Since Jesus is who He claims to be you can therefore go out and do what He commands because the command is based on His authority - power & ability - to accomplish it.

The command itself is to make disciples. Whatever else the church does, the center of its focus needs to be in making disciples. Our fellowship, our ministries, and even our worship all revolve around being and making disciples.

What is a disciple? A disciple is someone who follows the teachings of another. They learn from the teacher. They identify with the teacher. They seek to be like the teacher. Luke 6:40 gives a good description saying that the *"disciple is not above his teacher... but after being fully trained will be like his teacher."* Paul tells us in Rom. 8 that all those that will be saved are "predestined to be conformed to the image of [Jesus]."

You can see from this that if you claim to be a Christian, then being a disciple of Christ is not an option. Even the term, "Christian," speaks of discipleship since as Acts 11:26 states it was the "disciples" that were first called "Christians" in Antioch. The term itself means to be "a little Christ." A true Christian is someone who, as Paul describes in Gal. 2, has died to themselves and has Christ living in and through them. When people see you, do they see Christ living in you?

Jesus command is to make disciples of Him and you can not do that unless you are His disciple first. We make disciples of Christ the same way that the apostle Paul did in 1 Cor. 11:1 - *"be imitators of me just as I also am of Christ."* We call people to follow us as we follow Christ. If others became like us would they also be becoming like Christ? That is what making a disciple is all about. People begin to pattern their life after you, and since you have patterned your life after Jesus, they in turn are also becoming like Christ.

## GOING

Jesus commanded us to "make disciples" and gave three elements needed to accomplish that. First, is the going out. Notice that it is we that are to do the going. The little sign we have above the doors of this building as you go out reflect this. "You are now entering the mission field." Christians are to go out to the non-believers in order to start the process of making them into disciples of Christ. We are the ones that need to be making the effort. We are the ones that will be inconvenienced. We are the ones that will be in places that make us uncomfortable. We are the ones that will expend our time and money in the endeavor. We are the ones that are to "go."

This building is not the church and it cannot do the Lord's work. You are the church, and you do the work. This is only a building designed to help facilitate one aspect of making disciples - teaching them to observe all that the Lord commanded. This building cannot go out, and it cannot make disciples. It is only a building. You are the church, the body of Christ, and only you can fulfill Jesus' command to go.

Notice as well that we are to make disciples of "all nations." This reflects the fact that in Christ there is no room for prejudice. In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek - black or white - red or yellow. Keep in mind that the modern idea of "race" is from evolutionary thought. God only made one race - the Human race in all its morphological variations. God separated the human race into various "nations" and we are to go out to those nations and make disciples for Christ.

Making disciples of all nations also shows the necessity of going out. We have to leave our comfort zone to reach out to people who are different from us. They may have different physical characteristics - size, skin color, eyes, hair, noses and toes. They may have customs you do not understand - like putting jewelry in odd parts of their bodies and wearing funny looking and uncomfortable clothes (ties). They may eat food you consider unusual to say the least - snails, bugs, reptiles, amphibians and as one of our missionaries once found out, coagulated blood. You may not even know their language. They may live

somewhere else. But whether they are around the block or the world, the command is for us to go to them that we might make them disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The first aspect then of making disciples is to go out to the non-Christian community. Where can you meet non-Christians? Of course you can meet them anywhere, including in church, but where can you meet them in a context where you can begin to make them disciples of Christ? Again, almost anywhere. You are only limited by your imagination and willingness to be available. There are the obvious people & places like your neighborhood, school, and place of work, etc. There are also all the people you do business with, those who are involved in your hobbies, your social organizations, etc. There are all the people you can make special outreaches too: jails - adult and juvenile, convalescent homes, hospitals, parks, shopping malls, train stations, parades, fairs, flea markets, etc. God will use you if you are available. Are you willing to go?

What will you do when you go? You will use your spiritual gifts and you will proclaim the gospel, the good news of salvation from sin and reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ. Now that probably sounds scary to most of you. I suspect there are probably only a few people in the room that are gifted in evangelism who can hardly wait between opportunities to proclaim the gospel to someone they have never met before. Yet, evangelism - proclaiming the gospel - is a responsibility for every Christian. If "cold turkey" evangelism scares you, and it does me, then don't fret, God always enables you to do what He calls you to do. Your part is simply to be available and submissive.

You may not be able to talk to a stranger, but you can talk with those you have already built relationships with. You can also learn to become more bold in talking with others by doing it and trusting God to get you through it. As we focus on what God thinks of us instead of what other people think of us we are less intimidated. And finally, you can also use your spiritual gifts to support the activities of those that are gifted in evangelism. The church works together as a complete team with each member of it doing its part toward accomplishing its goal of making disciples of Christ.

## BAPTIZING

As the gospel goes out there will be those that respond and that brings the next element of making a disciple - baptism. *"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit."* Baptism should be one of the first steps in a new believer's walk of faith.

While there are many traditions concerning baptism, the scriptures are clear that it was only done by those who believed, so that excludes babies. It is also clear that it was done by immersion. Baptism does not save nor does it extend any special grace. Some of you were sprinkled as babies in a church and were told you were baptized. The truth is that all that happened to you is you got wet!

Baptism is an act of faithful obedience in public identification with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. To be baptized into the name of God marks you as professing to belong to God. Note that you are to be baptized into one "name." It is singular. That is why we only dunk once as opposed to three times as some other groups do. The singular "name" signifies the unity of the trinity. It is one God in three persons: Father, Son & Holy Spirit.

If you want a full understanding of what the Bible teaches about Baptism there are some information sheets in the back of the church. Pick one up, and if you have not been baptized by immersion since you have professed faith in Jesus Christ, then let me know so that we can arrange for you to be included in our next baptism.

## TEACHING

The third aspect of making disciples is "teaching them to observe all that I commanded you." There are those within the church that are specially gifted to teach, but this command is given to all. Parents teach their children. Mature believers teach new believers. Teaching is not just imparting knowledge as

some academic exercise. It is the interaction of your life with someone else so that they will be capable of living for Christ. You do not have to know all the answers, but you do have to know the Lord.

Keep in mind that while learning to do all that Jesus has commanded will be a lifelong process, it should only take a short time for someone to learn enough to begin the process with someone else. Even if you have been a Christian for a few months, if you have been careful to learn what has been taught to you about Jesus, you are already capable of working with a new Christian who knows less than you about living for Christ.

Let me stress the fact that this teaching is not an academic exercise. Yes, this teaching can be done from the pulpit and in the Sunday school class and in the home Bible study, for in all those formats the Word of God is explained so that we know what His commandments are. However, in making a disciple the stress is not on the knowledge but on the application of such knowledge. It is the interaction of one life with another so that both become more like Christ that is important. You do not need to even need to have good verbal skills to do this. All you need is a willingness to open your life and share what Christ is doing in your life with others by both word and example. It is using your spiritual gift, whatever it may be, and helping others become more like our savior.

It occurs while having a good attitude when watching babies in the nursery and praying for the parents who are getting to hear the sermon. It happens when you take your kids to the playground and you talk to another parent and encourage them in dealing with their children in a godly manner. It happens at work through your honest dealings and godly example to everyone. It is done sitting in a living room or coffee shop hearing someone's turmoil and praying with them. And yes, it even occurs in the more formal setting of committing yourself to a relationship or relationships for the express purpose of accountability and mutual encouragement in living for Christ. You can do Bible study or go through books together, memorize scripture or just talk about how things are going.

The key to success in teaching what Christ has commanded in making a disciple, is simply doing it. Live the life yourself. Take advantage of opportunities to encourage others to live the life. And develop accountability relationships where you can mutually challenge one another to live according to Christ's commands.

God can and will use you to make disciples if you are available, a worshiper of Christ, and willing to obey His commands.

Why am I so sure of this? Not just because it has been true in my own life, but more importantly, because Jesus has the power and authority to accomplish it. In addition, we find at the end of the last verse in Matthew that Jesus will be with us through it all. *"And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*

Jesus calls our attention by saying, "lo." It is a call to be alert and focus our minds on what He is now saying. He then makes it emphatic that He will be with us to the end. A literal translation being, *"I will be with you, even I, all the days even to the conclusion of the age."*

Jesus will be with you each and every day of your life even if that is to the conclusion of this age and you are transformed and taken to heaven without having to taste physical death. Jesus is present. His power is present. His command is given. The only question open is whether or not you will be available and obedient to let Him use you to make disciples of Him. What will you do?

God has called each of us to live in a manner worthy of our calling. That calling is not just to living sanctified lives in being separated from practicing sin, but also sanctified in being His servants carrying out the commission to make disciples of all nations. This is not an option nor a side issue. This is central to the Christian life. Who then are you helping to become a disciple of Jesus Christ? Where are you serving within the body of Christ so that the whole body is being built up in faith, knowledge, maturity and love? (Eph. 4:12-16).