

Sermons on Matthew

The Great Commission

Part Three
Make Disciples
Matthew 28:18-20

With Study Questions

*Pastor Paul Viggiano
Branch of Hope Church
2370 W. Carson Street, #100
Torrance, CA 90501
(310) 212-6999
pastorpaul@integrity.com
www.branchofhope.org
2/15/2009*

The Great Commission

Part Three
Make Disciples
Matthew 28:18-20

And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, __“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ⁻¹⁹⁻ __Go __therefore and __make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ⁻²⁰⁻ __teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am __with you always, *even to the end of the age.*” __Amen (Matthew 28:18-20).

Preface—Mission Statements

Mission statements have become a non-negotiable for businesses and churches alike. Usually in a single sentence, the mission statement expresses the purpose for the organization’s existence. Some examples include:

1. Reebok: "Our purpose is to ignite a passion for winning, to do the extraordinary, and to capture the customer’s heart and mind."
2. Walt Disney: "To make people happy."
3. Wal-Mart: "To give ordinary folk the chance to buy the same things as rich people."
4. Sony: "to experience the joy of advancing and applying technology for the benefit of the public."
5. 3M: "To solve unsolved problems innovatively."

Some churches:

6. At Blank Community Church we're not about "having it all together" or even pretending we do. We're just a family trying to grow together toward a God who knows us and can help us put all the pieces of this sometimes bizzare world into perspective. We may not have all the answers but we

know someone who does. In fact He not only knows the answers...He made up the questions.

7. Blank Chapel is a body of Pentecostal believers whose purpose is to worship God as we evangelize the world, and provide a place of fellowship to equip the believer for service to God and man.

8. Reaching out with passion for God and compassion for people.

These are all pretty good mission statements. We, as a church, don't actually have a mission statement but if we did, I think I would vote for the passage we read this morning.

Introduction—A Preamble

These final words recorded in the Gospel of Matthew have come to be known as the Great Commission; the marching orders for the church. Similar to the Ten Commandments, the Great Commission has a preamble; it begins, not with what we are to do, but with what God has done.

The Ten Commandments begin with God's great proclamation of having delivered the Israelites from bondage (Exodus 20:2). Israel didn't keep the commandments in order to somehow achieve freedom from Egypt, God called them to keep His commandments because He had set them free. That's a pretty significant distinction. Obedience is a result of and response to God's grace; it doesn't somehow procure God's grace.

The Great Commission begins in similar fashion. Before Jesus informs His church of their mission, He informs us of the success of His mission. In His life, death, resurrection and soon ascension Jesus fulfilled all righteousness (Matthew 3:15), bore our sins (1 Peter 2:24), assured our justification or peace with God (Romans 4:25) and took the seat of King David as ruler of the kings of the earth (Revelation 1:5).

The devil, who held sway over all the earth (1 John 5:19) was disarmed by the cross of Christ and made a public spectacle (Colossians 2:15) having been bound that he might deceive the nations no more (Matthew 12:29; Revelation 20:2). It is in the light of this, which Jesus summed up by claiming to have all authority in heaven and on the earth, that we are given this Great Commission. The price has been paid and the victory won and we are given the great and glorious task of being a herald of the good news with our various gifts and abilities.

As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God (1 Peter 4:10).

Go

As discussed in a previous message, the first word in the commission is “Go”. The “Go” is actually not a command; that is, it is not in the imperative as one might think. It is in the aorist, passive, which really makes it more all-encompassing. The “Go” in the Great Commission is not some special trip we take somewhere (although it certainly could include that).

The “Go” may be best understood **“Having gone on your way”** make disciples, or “as you are going” make disciples. Or more loosely put, “wherever you find yourselves, make disciples.” It basically includes all of us wherever we might be.

Make Disciples

Now we look at the only actual command in the Great Commission—make disciples. Baptism (which we’ll get to later) is a form of ratifying the faith. The scope is all nations (which we’ll also get to at another time) and the once a disciple is made Jesus commissions instruction. But this morning we will finish by asking only two questions: What is a disciple and how is one made?

What is a Disciple? A Follower

So what is a disciple? In the loosest sense a disciple is a follower. This was one my early difficulties when it came to this issue. You get the impression by reading the Bible that Jesus’ disciples followed Him around. Apparently that was pretty standard procedure in the teacher-student relationship.

I remember having a difficult time translating this to real life for a couple of reasons: first, Jesus isn’t walking around any more (at least not in the flesh on this planet). Of course there are followers of Jesus still walking around. And we certainly can follow them the way they followed their instructors, the way they followed theirs all the way back to the original disciples and Jesus.

But my second difficulty, especially once I got a job, got married and had children was finding the time to follow someone around. I still had it

in my head to seek to create that environment we see in the gospels where Jesus is being followed 24/7. In a certain sense we must view that time as a pretty unique three year period. And this isn't to say that there isn't some value in spending time with more mature Christians and seeking to imitate them to the extent that they imitate Christ, for which reason Paul wrote **"Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1).**

But being a disciple is much more than following someone around. Again, in a very loose sense, the gospels portray disciples as people (sometimes probably pretty big groups of people) following Jesus around. After Jesus fed the five thousand (John 6:1-14) and walked on water (John 6:15-21) a lot of people started following Him around. Who wouldn't? John refers to these people as Jesus' disciples—even though short-lived.

They were excited about the miracles but when Jesus gave a sermon they didn't like, John records, **"_From that *time* many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more (John 6:66).**

A Student

Perhaps in the tightest sense Matthew refers to the twelve (soon to be eleven) as Christ's disciples (Matthew 10:1; 28:16). Jesus has a definition of a disciple that should help us sort this out.

A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher (Luke 6:40).

A disciple is someone who is being trained by Christ. Jesus is our teacher. **"Perfectly trained"** *katartizo* means to be made adequate or sufficient or complete. Every generation has a group of believers who pine away after experiencing God or Jesus. Well enough. But whatever that *experience* is, the doorstep to a true experience with God—true discipleship—is found in the word of God.

Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.³² And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free (John 8:31, 32).

So disciple, in a biblical sense, means student. But it's not merely a student who takes a class then goes home. It is the kind of student who is attached to his teacher—the teacher governs all his life and doctrine. In the

case of Christ, the student is seeking to become like his teacher in every reasonable way.

Teaches of Himself

But most importantly the true disciple of Christ, as a student, learns and believes what Jesus teaches about Himself—that He is the **“Christ, the Son of the Living God”** (Matthew 16:16)—that He came to **“seek and the save that which was lost”** (Luke 19:10)—**“to give His life as a ransom for many”** (Matthew 20:28).

So a true disciple is one who believes what Jesus taught about everything, including Himself. A disciple is a Christian. It’s worth noting that the word ‘disciple’ isn’t used after Acts (21:16). In Acts 11:26 the disciples were called “Christians”.

Making Disciples

But how does one go about obeying this imperative of making disciples? Maybe it’s a urban legend but a story used to go around that one of Idi Amin’s henchmen came to faith in Christ and started making disciples the only way he knew how—at gunpoint. You’ve got to admire his spirit (I imagine it could have been quite effective also) but that is just wrong.

The Look of a Disciple

One of the initial observations we should make before we talk about the true nuts and bolts of how disciples make other disciples is that there is to be something special about the disciple—something winsome. Jesus said it this way:

_By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another (John 13:35).

So the disciple-making disciple is one who exhibits true love for one another. What that love looks like is something we’ll cover when we get to what it means to obey all that Jesus commands later in the Great

Commission. Love looks like something. There is an objectivity to love—a define-ability if you will (see 1 Corinthians 13).

According to Jesus a disciple is one who **“does the will of My Father in heaven” (Matthew 12:50)**. What you become after being a disciple begins to function toward making disciples. God desires that the people who are His ambassadors be a certain type of people—loving, giving, servants, temperate, contrite, gentle and so on. And the more authority God gives to people in His church (e. g. elders and deacons) that higher the standard and the greater the judgment (James 3:1) for falling short.

The kind of people we are as Christians can either bring honor to God and redemption to people or embarrassment to God and estrangement from people.¹

You who say, “Do not commit adultery,” do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? ⁻²³⁻ You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law? ⁻²⁴⁻ For “the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you (Romans 2:22-24).

More than Goodness

Having said all of this it must quickly be added that being a wonderful person simply isn't enough. The idea that I am going to lead people to Christ by my actions is (and I don't mean to sound harsh) is amazingly arrogant—as if my life is so stellar that one need merely look at me to get saved.

A few weeks back I heard a little slogan that is apparently used in a Christian relief organization: “Share the gospel, if necessary use words.” The gospel is words. It's the good news. You can't have news without words unless you're really good at charades (and even then you're hoping they'll figure out what the charade means—with words).

How to Make a Disciple

How are disciples made? We read in Acts:

¹ This is not to say there is no offense of the cross. But often the offense is the person rather than the cross.

- **And when they had preached the gospel to that city __ and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch (Acts 14:21).**

Disciples are made through the preaching of God's word. In Mark's record of the Great Commission this is even clearer.

_And He said to them, "Go into all the world __ and preach the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15).

In order to make disciples, our chief directive is to bring the gospel—that the gospel reaches the ears of people. The Apostle Paul expresses why he was so ready to preach the gospel.

For _I am not ashamed of the gospel _of Christ, for _it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes (Romans 1:16).

In response to Greek philosophy, which had worked its way into the church, Paul somewhat sarcastically writes:

For since, in the __wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe (1 Corinthians 1:21).

This seemed to be a recurring theme for Paul (and not Paul only—Jesus and John the Baptist came teaching and preaching).

-How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear _without a preacher? ⁻¹⁵⁻ And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: _*"How beautiful are the feet of those who __preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!"* ⁻¹⁶⁻ But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, __*"Lord, who has believed our report?"* ⁻¹⁷⁻ So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God (Romans 10:14-17).

This was the practice of the early church when God was adding to the church daily, thousands who were being saved (Acts 2:40-47). The gospel is what you should hear when you come to church. The gospel is what your friends should hear when you invite them. It is through the gospel that God is glorified and His people redeemed. The gospel is how disciples are made.

Questions for Study

1. What's a mission statement? Do they have strengths and weaknesses (page 2)?
2. What is the "preamble" to the Great Commission and why do you think Jesus gave it (pages 3, 4)?
3. Discuss the "Go" in the Great Commission. Is it more or less inclusive than you originally thought (page 4)?
4. What are the different dimensions of disciple? Are all disciples definitely Christians (pages 4, 5)?
5. What do you think is the most important aspect of true discipleship (pages 4-6)?
6. What should a disciple look like (page 7)?
7. Are words necessary for the gospel (page 8)?
8. How are disciples made (pages 8, 9)?

