

Session 1

THE CALL TO MULTIPLY

Matthew 28:18-20

Memory Verse

Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

– MATTHEW 28:19, CSB



The Call to Multiply

THEOLOGICAL THEME: God’s plan for the spread of the gospel and expansion of the Kingdom is through disciples multiplying disciples.

? What comes to mind when you hear the phrase “making disciples?”

? Who in the Bible was a disciple maker? What did he or she do to make disciples?

? Are you the disciple of anyone? Do you disciple anyone? What does that relationship look like?

“Making disciples” may be one of the most frequently spoken phrases in evangelical churches. At the same time, it is probably one of the least carried out the commands of Jesus, at least in the Western church.

The text we are looking at clarifies two important matters. First, it explains that discipleship is a priority. If we don't grasp the gravity of this command then we won't do it. Secondly, these verses explain how we are to go about completing the task. This is not a detailed guide to making disciples, but it does give us a broad outline to apply to our disciple-making context.

Session Summary

The context for the Great Commission is that Jesus had been crucified, buried, and resurrected. He appeared to His disciples and they worshiped Him, though some doubted. In the midst of this worship, Jesus gave them the Great Commission. It's difficult to think of a moment in Jesus' earthly ministry where words would have been more important. What Jesus said here is paramount in His followers' lives.


1. Go (Matt. 28:18-19a)

Before Jesus' ascension, He left the church some final instructions in a passage known as the Great Commission. Jesus appeared to His disciples on several occasions after the resurrection, but He took the opportunity prior to His ascension to leave them His final command. In English, this verse contains two commands—"go" and "make disciples." In the original language, only one of these is a command. "Make disciples" is the central focus of the passage. The rest of the passage explains Jesus' vision for how to make disciples.

The text uses the Greek word, *proselthōn*, which means "He came close to them." Perhaps there was a larger crowd there and Jesus wanted to speak directly to the disciples. Or maybe He leaned in to them to emphasize the importance of what He was about to say. Whatever the case, His words were astounding. He spoke as One already seated at the right hand of the Father, with a global outlook on the present and future and with all the resources of heaven at His command. Jesus had authority and power before His death and resurrection, but now He would no longer empty Himself of any authority or power. (See Phil. 2:7.) His authority is boundless and includes heaven and earth.

Jesus gave His disciples a task they could never accomplish in their own strength, yet He did not expect them to fail. "All authority ... on heaven and on earth" (v. 18) means Jesus possessed total authority. Nothing in the universe is outside of the sovereign rule and


reign of Christ. When Jesus sent His disciples into the world, He sent them under the banner of His own authority. When people come to believe the gospel, it is not because of a compelling or persuasive messenger but because of the power that lives in the message of the gospel. (See Rom. 1:16.)

 What does it mean for us that Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth?

 How does this relate to the mission we have been given?

We are under Jesus' command. There are no lone-ranger, rogue Christians who have the right to draw up their own battle plans. This is one of the reasons we organize in groups that seek to be faithful to this command of Christ. The mission has been clearly stated and followers of Jesus are called to carry it out. Yes, how the mission is carried out is shaped by context, but it must never be shaped in such a way that the essence of the mission is compromised.

Further, we go to complete the mission with full assurance of our security and victory. Our Master has all the authority. This means that no ground upon which we set our foot is outside of the control and authority of our Command-in-Chief. There are no sovereign nations in the spiritual realm. All rulers and authorities are under the authority and command of the one true and living God.

 Application: To whom has God sent you? Where are the places He has given you grace, influence, and presence?

2. Baptize and Teach (Matt. 28:19b-20a)

By His authority, Jesus commissioned the eleven disciples to make more disciples in “all nations.” Jesus’ challenge was not limited in geography. The Greek word translated nations is the plural of *ethnos*, from which we get the English word ethnic. It included both Jews and Gentiles. God desires to reach all people, not only of every political nation but also of every people group. While many things in Scripture describe events that we should not expect to see happen again (such as the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost), the Great Commission is prescriptive because it is a command to be obeyed by all Christians, at all times.



How should we understand Jesus’ command to baptize? What does that mean for us as we seek to be disciples who multiply disciples?

Does Jesus want us to only go around baptizing people? No. That’s not the point here. For Jews, baptism was synonymous with conversion. It was a ritual that was used to signify and mark one’s conversion. We can see this dynamic playing out in the Book of Acts. Conversion is so closely linked to baptism that sometimes it seems that conversion is equivalent to baptism (Acts 2:38), though a brief survey of the New Testament teaching quickly dismisses that possibility. Nonetheless, baptism is an important step in the life of a newly converted follower of Christ; it is both his or her public confession of and identification with Jesus Christ.

So, we should read baptism in this passage and think conversion. We know that conversion only happens when a person responds with faith and repentance to the gospel. So, if we want to obey the first part of Jesus’ command to make disciples, then we must seek out gospel conversations. We must be about explaining the gospel to everyone with whom we have a hearing.



How should we understand the command to teaching? What does this mean for every follower of Christ?

Though this aspect of the Great Commission is much more straightforward, it generally isn't what we think of when we consider how we might accomplish the Great Commission. Being obedient to the command of Jesus in Matthew 28 is more than teaching the gospel through a one-time message, though it is certainly not less than this.

Jesus said that we should teach them “to observe everything I have commanded you” (v. 20). This is what we commonly call discipleship. So, when we read the Great Commission, it is clear that Jesus' command is for us to be faithful in evangelism and discipleship. We ought not to be only concerned for the justification of sinners, but also the sanctification of the saints.

Making disciples is the mission of every Christian; this is the reason we remain on earth. Jesus challenged His followers to take the gospel to others. Jesus did not call His disciples to make converts, but to make disciples. This implies the total witness of proclaiming the gospel, leading people to faith, and training them to follow Jesus. Living sent every day is about much more than evangelism; it includes helping people grow in their relationship with Jesus and teaching them how to go out and share the good news of the gospel, too. The most important calling we can embrace in life is to make disciples of others around us by going, baptizing, and teaching.



Application: How has God called you specifically to be involved in making disciples of “all nations”?

3. To the End of the Age (Matt. 28:20b)

Jesus gave the disciples a promise at the end of the commission. He assured them of His presence. Jesus promised He would be with His followers always, to the end of the age. The God who sends us will never leave us. Jesus promised His presence to go with believers as they made disciples. Jesus cares greatly about His mission in the world, so much so that He died for it and promised to be with each of us as we faithfully obey to take His gospel to every nation in the world. Though the Great Commission may make us uncomfortable at times, we are compelled by love to obey Jesus' command.

How significant this must have been. The disciples were looking at the One with whom they had walked, talked, and followed for three years. They had given up everything to follow Him and they loved Him deeply. So, Jesus' promise of presence was doubly comforting for those disciples. This isn't to diminish the profound comfort that it is for all believers, but we should acknowledge how those men must have felt in that moment.

? How might the promise of Jesus' presence shape our posture toward daily life in a fallen and broken world? How might it encourage us in our groups and as we go and seek gospel conversations?

It must have been a mountaintop experience for the disciples to see the risen Christ, receive the Great Commission, and watch Jesus' ascension. Their hearts must have swelled with love and joy. Blood and adrenaline must have coursed through their veins, causing a heightened sense of energy, resolve, and optimism. Of course they would complete the Great Commission and Jesus would be with them! But, what about when that memory began to fade and they grew weary with the work? What about when Stephen was martyred and believers were chased out of Jerusalem? (See Acts 8.) Jesus' blessed and amazing promise is that He will be with His disciples—all His disciples—in every day, sorrow, suffering, weakness, and trial. The promise Jesus' presence is just as certain when it doesn't feel as though He is there, as when it does.

? How should Jesus's presence affect the way we work to obey the Great Commission?

Jesus' promise wasn't intended to allow us complacently rest in our own wellbeing and security. Rather, it ought to be an incentive to pour ourselves out on the altar of service to our Lord for the completion of the Great Commission.



Application: How can we help one another live sent and support our church's mission efforts as a group?

Conclusion

Followers of Christ are sent into the world to faithfully labor to complete the Great Commission. While we might think of missionaries as those sent around the world to share the gospel, the reality is that all Christ-followers are sent to tell others about Him whether near or far.

Jesus, with all the authority in heaven and earth, sent out His disciples. That commission wasn't for that small band of believers only, it carries forward to all those who trust in Him. Not only is this logical, but it is embedded in the command itself. They were to teach new converts to obey all that Jesus had commanded them, which would include the commission itself. (See v. 20.)

It's clear that every Christians' mission is to make disciples by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. We must be careful not to assume that "proclaiming the gospel" necessarily refers to being behind a pulpit or standing on a street corner. Those certainly are proclamations of the gospel, but there are many other contexts in which the gospel may be proclaimed. A proclamation of the gospel may take place when you share the gospel to your seatmate on an airplane. The gospel is proclaimed when you read a gospel tract with your neighbor.

The original mission to go and make disciples of all nations hasn't changed at all 2,000 years later. Christ-followers are still sent by the Lord Jesus into the world to fulfill the Great Commission by going; praying; and supporting the work of proclaiming the gospel to every tribe, tongue, and nation.

 Do you see yourself as under Jesus' authority? How does that affect your life and ministry?

 In what ways are you participating in the Great Commission? Who have you shared the gospel with in the past month? Who are you teaching/discipling?

 How does the promise of Jesus' presence in your life compel you to seek out gospel conversations and discipleship?

CHRIST CONNECTION: The gospel is the foundational message that all followers of Jesus are sent to share.

MISSIONAL APPLICATION: In this passage, Jesus commanded His followers to go into all the world to make disciples who would make disciples. We practice this by participating in groups, going to our neighbors and the nations, and seeking gospel conversations with others.



FOR NEXT WEEK

Community: What Are We Trying to do Here?

Main Passages

- Mark 12:31

Memorize

Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

- Matthew 28:19, CSB

Daily Readings

- Monday - Matthew 28:19-20

- Tuesday - 2 Timothy 2:2

- Wednesday - Luke 9:23

- Thursday - Acts 1:8

- Friday - Matthew 24:14

- Saturday - Luke 10:2