

Our Mission Matthew 28:18-20

Why are we here? What is the mission our Lord has for our life? Jesus' last words to His first followers before His ascension answer these questions for us. A person's last words are often times words of great significance. They tell us the most important things our loved ones wanted us to remember. As our Lord is about to leave His disciples physically on this earth while He departs to His Father's house to prepare a place for them, He too has some important last words to leave with them. The mission Jesus gives to the disciples in Matthew 28 isn't only significant for His first followers, but also for us today. These last words define what our mission in life as individuals should be and the elders of JBC have decided together that they will define the mission on which our church will focus.

The Commanded Mission- Make Disciples! (Matthew 28:18-20)

In this, our Lord's final commission to His followers, Jesus issues just one command. That command, located in verse 19, is to "make disciples."

What is a disciple?

In order to make something, we need to understand first what it is that we are making. Bauer's Greek-English Lexicon gives the following definitions for the Greek Word translated "disciples" in verse 19- "a learner, pupil, adherent."

Thinking through the meaning of the Greek Word, Jesus' instructions to His disciples, and the example of His disciples, I think of a disciple of Christ under the following definition:

A disciple of Christ is a faithful, fruitful, follower of Him

The disciple is faithful to learn and carry out Jesus' commands. The disciple is fruitful or productive in accomplishing what Jesus intends –i.e. The disciples' life and ministry imitates Christ's. The disciple is a follower of Jesus who is willing to pay the price of such a pursuit— i.e. denial of self and taking up one's cross.

Making disciples isn't just adding more converts

Notice that Jesus doesn't command us to add more converts. Rather, He commands us to "make disciples." Certainly telling people the gospel and leading them to trust in Christ to receive eternal life is an important part of the process, but it is only the beginning of the process.

Porter writes, "To focus on just bringing people to trust Christ and receive eternal life is like a mother who gives birth to a child, stands up and says, 'Well, I'm glad that's over with!' In reality, the birthing process is just the beginning. The mother will invest the rest of her life helping that child develop toward maturity!"

Making disciples works that way too. Once we've had the opportunity to lead a person to the Savior, the process of teaching them what it means to be a faithful follower of Christ is just beginning. We will spend the rest of our lives helping them develop to maturity...."

Making disciples is helping others to become faithful, fruitful followers of Jesus Christ

This is a daily task we carry out wherever we go

Disciple making isn't just the job of missionaries who go to another country to serve the Lord. It is the responsibility of each and every one of us as believers, wherever God puts us. Most understand the word "go" to be the first command the Lord gives in this passage. In reality, our Lord uses a participle here that is best translated "as you are going." The point is that as we go, wherever we go, we are to be about His business of making disciples.

Understanding that disciples are to be made wherever we go, we realize that it is not a part time job, but a daily task. It is also not something that occurs only in formal, organized ministries, but should also be a part of our ordinary, daily routine. As you are going and wherever God puts you, make disciples there. God put you in the neighborhood where you live. Make disciples there. God put you in your work environment. Make disciples there. God put you in your group of friends. Make disciples there. God placed you in your family. Wherever God puts you at any given time, make disciples there.

At this point, the following question comes to mind, "Have we seriously considered where God wants us to serve Him?" While it isn't God's will to send everyone to a foreign field, He does have for some to fill this role. I believe there needs to be a willingness to go everywhere God might lead, no matter where it is, if we are to be effective at making disciples anywhere. How can we be effective at making disciples, at teaching others to obey Christ, if we remain unwilling to go anywhere and everywhere that God might lead us?

I believe it is also important that we check our attitude when God puts us in a place we didn't expect or necessarily want to go. Remember in the context in which Jesus first gave the Great Commission, He was fully aware of the persecution that would follow and how His followers would be dispersed all over the world. I am sure that Marine families have occasions when they feel just like the early Christians did. They get dispersed to a place where they didn't expect to be. When this is the case, God help us to resist the temptation to complain and feel sorry for ourselves. Instead, our mindset should be, I wonder what God has in store for me here as His disciple maker.

This is a daunting task considering the fact that our target is all nations

Jesus said we are responsible to make disciples of all nations—of all of the people groups of the world. Giving allowances for the differences that occur depending on who you ask and the criteria they use for determining whether a certain country should be counted, there are currently 195 countries in the world. Estimates are that there are close to 7,000 languages spoken in the world today.

As of May of this year, the U.S. Census Bureau estimates the world's population at 6,823,200,000. There are so many countries, so many languages and cultures, so many people—how could we possibly accomplish the task of making disciples of all the people groups of the world? We'll address this question in a moment.

This is a demanding task considering the means for making a disciple

We are to baptize Christ's followers

A part of the process of making disciples involves baptizing believers in Christ who want to make the commitment to identify themselves publicly as His followers. Through baptism, people make a statement to friends and family that they belong to Christ and want people to know what He has done for them.

When someone is involved in baptizing others and when a person is being baptized, others watching know these people are really serious about their commitment to Christ. It is these committed followers of Christ who are targeted first by opposition. In a number of areas in the world, unbelieving friends and family are fine when someone professes faith in Christ. However, when that person decides to get baptized, it is then that hostility often breaks out. Given the pressures people face not to take their commitment to follow Christ so seriously for fear of the threats that can ensue, it is often a demanding challenge to lead others to take this step of obedience.

We are to teach Christ's disciples to observe all that He's commanded

Notice that Jesus doesn't just say that we are to teach people all that He commanded. He says we are to teach people *to observe* all that He commanded. We could teach people all that Jesus commanded in a series of weekly lessons. Teaching people what Jesus commanded isn't all that difficult. Teaching people to observe all He commanded—now that's a different story. A lot of time and energy is required to show others how to live a godly, Christ-like life that is pleasing to the LORD and in keeping with our Lord's commands. Certainly, this process will involve meeting in formal ministry settings for Bible study. But it will often involve much more. The disciple maker will talk with people on the phone to answer their questions, meet with people on the spur of the moment to give them advice about how to handle a particular situation, receive phone calls in the middle of the night to help with a crisis situation, spend informal time together, allowing others to observe their life in everyday situations, etc.

The apostle Paul understood well what the process of disciple making requires. He communicated to the Thessalonian believers whom he was involved in discipling—“We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God, but our lives as well.” The more we grow in our understanding of what disciple making is all about, the more we understand how life consuming the process is. Disciple making isn't like a hobby we tinker with or a part time job we do a couple hours a week. It is a life being spent, being poured out to reproduce more disciples of Christ.

This is a doable task considering the resources our Lord has made available to us

As we consider how daunting and demanding the task of making disciples of all nation is, we might ask the question, “Is it really possible?” We might begin to doubt and say things like, “We can’t do it! We aren’t smart enough, rich enough, or strong enough to get the job done!” When we give this kind of response, we demonstrate we have the wrong focus. We are focusing on what we think we are able to do. In this case, the task is in fact impossible.

Instead, we need to focus on and respond to Christ’s ability. Is He able? Most certainly YES! This task is doable as we depend on Christ to provide the resources we need to accomplish it. David Dawson writes, “God is searching for men and women who believe that He is able and who will respond to His ability.” Consider the resources Christ has promised us:

He sends us under His authority and power

He assures us of His presence

What more do we need with regards to resources to accomplish the mission?! Christ’s resources are completely sufficient for the task!

The story is told of a man by the name of John Pemberton. He lived over a hundred years ago. One day John stirred together a concoction that was later named Coca Cola. When Pemberton was getting started, he sold on average 9 glasses a day. Today Coca-Cola is consumed in all 195 countries of the world. Its trademark is recognized by an astounding 94% of the world’s population. In 1988 it was the first independent commercial entity in the communist ruled Soviet Union. Coca-Cola products are served more than 705 million times every day. Every second over 7,000 Coca-Cola products are consumed. If all the Coca-Cola ever produced were in 6 1/2 oz. bottles and placed end to end they would wrap around the earth more than 11,863 times. If Coca-Cola can get their product to the ends of the earth, then certainly with resources like Christ’s presence and power, we can make disciples of Christ all over the world.

This task is doable considering the genius of our Lord’s plan

If we are to lead people to Christ and stop there, converts are added to Christ’s body one at a time. While this is a good thing, it is not all our Lord commanded us to do. He commanded us to “make disciples.” When we make disciples, the principle of multiplication goes into effect. When we reach someone with the gospel of Christ, we train that person to observe Christ’s commands. We train them to live out and share their faith and to see that it is their responsibility to reach still others. If we have done our job well, those we disciple will disciple others who will disciple still others. When reproducing disciples are made and the principle of multiplication goes into effect, then the ratio of reached to unreached goes down dramatically faster as compared to the principle of addition when we simply add one convert at a time.

Consider the power of multiplication and the possibility of reaching our world for Christ. If you reach someone for Christ and disciple that person, then there are two disciples. If the two of you disciple two more, then there are four. If all four of you disciple four more, then there are eight.

If you were to disciple one person a year and each of your disciples were to make a disciple a year each year, then in twenty years, you will have been a part of helping to reach 524,288 people. If in that same period of time, you led one person a year to Christ, but did not disciple those people, then in the course of 20 years, you will have reached 20 people.

Consider how fast the ratio of reached people to unreached people would dwindle if we, the church, were to take seriously the responsibility Christ has given us to make disciples.

Suppose for the sake of illustration that you are presently the only Christian in the world. The ratio of reached people to unreached people would be one to 6,800,000,000 (I have rounded to make the math easier to follow). If you were to disciple a person a year for 20 years and all of your disciples and their disciples were to do the same, then in those 20 years, the ratio of reached people to unreached people would shrink to one reached person for every 12,969 unreached people.

How quickly the world could be reached through this process! Of course, this system breaks down when people don't accept their responsibility to disciple other people. That's why the world hasn't yet been reached. Every follower of Christ must make a commitment to disciple making for the plan to be carried out this way.

Summary of our Lord's mission for us:

Each of us are to use the resources of God's presence and power, wherever we go, to form faithful, fruitful followers of Jesus Christ, baptizing them and teaching them to do everything He has commanded us

Desiring as a church body to take our Lord's Commission seriously, the church leadership has developed the following statement of our mission:

Our mission is to glorify God by making disciples of Christ who obey His commands and train others to do the same

Consider the point of the following tale:

Now it came to pass that a group existed who called themselves fisherman. And lo, there were many fish in the waters all around. In fact the whole area was surrounded by streams and lakes filled with fish. And the fish were hungry.

Week after week, month after month, and year after year, those who called themselves fishermen met in meetings and talked about their call to fish, the abundance of fish, and how they might go about fishing. Year after year they carefully defined what fishing means, defended fishing as an occupation, and declared that fishing is always to be a primary task of fisherman.

These fisherman built large, beautiful buildings for local fishing headquarters. The plea was that everyone should be a fisherman and every fisherman should fish. One thing they didn't do, however; they didn't fish.

In addition to meeting regularly, they organized a board to send out fishermen to other places where there were many fish. The board was formed by those who had the great vision and courage to speak about fishing, to define fishing, to promote the idea of fishing in far away streams and lakes where many other fish of different colors lives. Also the board hired staffs and appointed committees and held many meetings to define fishing, to defend fishing, to decide what new streams should be thought about. But the staff and committee members did not fish.

Large, elaborate, and expensive training centers were built whose original and primary purpose was to teach fishermen how to fish. Over the years courses were offered on the needs of the fish, the nature of fish, how to define fish, the psychological reactions of fish, and how to approach and feed fish. Those who taught had doctorates in “fishology.” But the teachers did not fish. They only taught fishing.

Further, the fishermen built large printing houses to publish fishing guides. Pressers were kept busy day and night to produce materials solely devoted to fishing methods, equipment, and programs, to arrange and encourage meetings, to talk about fishing. A speakers’ bureau was also provided to schedule special speakers on the subject of fishing.

After one stirring meeting on “The Necessity of Fishing,” one young fellow left the meeting and went fishing. The next day he reported that he had caught two outstanding fish. He was honored for his excellent catch and scheduled to visit all the big meetings possible to tell how he did it. So he quit his fishing in order to have time to tell about the experience to other fishermen. He was also placed on the Fisherman’s General Board as a person having considerable experience.

Imagine how hurt some were when one day a person suggested that those who don’t fish were not really fishermen, no matter how much they claimed to be. Yet it did sound correct. Is a person a fisherman if year after year he never catches a fish? Is one following if he isn’t fishing?

Jesus said in Matthew 4:19- “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.”

Are we really following Jesus if we aren’t fishing?

Are we really following Jesus as His faithful followers if we aren’t making others into faithful, fruitful followers of Christ?

The tale I have just read has a way of jarring us to consider just how serious we really are about faithfully following Christ. If we really are Christ’s faithful followers, then we will be fishers of men, we will be making disciples.

Practical steps each of us can take to fulfill the mission that Christ has given us?:

Pray for two

Pray for the opportunity to share the gospel with two people and the opportunity to do follow up discipleship with one person this year. Faithful prayer reminds us to focus on God, on His ability, on His resources.

Also, God delights in giving us opportunities in answer to our prayers. He delights in answering prayers for us to be used where He commands us to be involved in His work. Another benefit of prayer is that as we pray, God will also work in us to help us overcome the common fears that all of us encounter when faced with the tasks of evangelism and discipleship.

Allow someone to disciple us

Find a person to come along side you to help you become all that God wants you to be. As you are being disciplined, remember the purpose of the process. You aren't being disciplined only to help you take next steps in your Christian walk. You are also being disciplined with the intent that you will take what you have learned and pass it on to others. The apostle Paul mentored and disciplined Timothy. Consider the following challenge Paul gave to Timothy- "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others" (2 Timothy 2:2)

Encourage others in the disciple making process

Disciple someone else

Make disciples. Some might object, "I don't know very much, how can I disciple another person?" The fact is, every Christian, no matter how much experience they have in the Christian life has something to share with others. We can always tell someone out there what God has done in our life and pass on the truth of God's Word we have learned thus far, no matter how simple those lessons might be.

It has been well said that every believer needs a Paul, a Barnabus, and a Timothy. What do we mean by that? Paul was a disciple maker. We all need someone mentoring and discipling us—we need a Paul. Barnabus was an encourager. We need someone coming along to encourage us along in the process of making disciples—we need a Barnabus. Timothy was a young man who allowed Paul to disciple him. We need someone to whom we can pass on what we have learned so as to help disciple them—we need a Timothy.

Get involved in a Community Small Group where there is serious Bible study, prayer, closeness, and accountability

The question is often asked, where does discipleship best take place, one on one or in a small group? I don't think the answer is either/or, but both/and. Jesus certainly carried out discipleship in a small group setting. There were also occasions where He took individuals aside to work specifically with them. We believe our Community Small Group ministry is key to our disciple making efforts here at JBC.

Consider this, if all five of the elders of JBC were to disciple an adult person a year for the next four years and all of their disciples were to disciple another person and theirs' another, then all of the adults regularly attending JBC would be disciplined in that time. In the fifth year, the number of adults in our church would double in size. In just 14 years, the entire population, both adults and children, of Jacksonville and Richlands combined would be reached.

Wait, that just covers the elders, but it isn't just the Elder's responsibility to make disciples. The Elders are held responsible, based on Ephesians 4:11-12, to equip the saints for the work of the ministry. Making disciples isn't just the job of the church's leadership. It is every believer's job. If every adult who regularly attends Jacksonville Bible Church were to get involved in this process and those they disciplined were to join them, it would take only 10 years to reach the entire population of Jacksonville and Richlands combined.

Will you join us in pursuit of the mission God has given to JBC? **Our mission is to glorify God by making disciples of Christ who obey His commands and train others to do the same.**