

## What is the Mission of the Church?

**Matthew 28:16 (Pg 487)** Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. **17** And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. **18** And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. **19** 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, **20** teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

- I. If I were to come as a guest into North Ridge Life Church this morning, having no idea about God, or Christianity and ask for responses to the question, "What is the mission of the church?" would I find among us a clear, unifying answer?
  - A. There are several problems that I imagine I would encounter.
    1. First, some I talked to might not have a clue what the mission of this or any other church is, or where to find out the answer to the question.
    2. Others might assume they know, having strongly held opinions of what the church should be doing based on a preferred "pet doctrine" like the imminent end of the world, or the use of spiritual gifts, worship styles, etc.
    3. Others might say something that sounds noble or spiritual like, "our mission is reaching the lost" or "transforming culture". But if I were to fire back, "Great! How are you doing at that?"; we might be forced into stupefied silence by our own ineffectiveness, or, worse yet, our inactivity.
    4. Still others might differ on the most basic definition of words like "mission" and "church". Others might wonder if the answer to the question could even be known or possibly agreed upon.
  - B. But I am certain that Jesus never intended us to be in the dark as to what our mission was. The passage we read a moment ago in Matthew 28 gave us one version of the final words spoken by Jesus after his crucifixion and resurrection, and before he ascended to his throne at the right hand of his Father.
    1. Christians over the years have called this passage "the Great Commission" because it represents the marching orders that Jesus "committed" to his followers; the "commission" he expected them to fulfill.
    2. The passage in Matthew 28 is not the only version of these words. You can find similar versions of these orders in Mark, Luke, and Acts. The shortest version is found in John 20:21, where the Jesus says to his disciples after his resurrection, "***Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.***"
  - C. Now, everyone knows that a person's last words are significant.
    1. Sometimes they reflect a buoyant sense of humor. When the comic legend Groucho Marx was dying, he reportedly said, "This is no way to live!"
    2. Last words are often profound. Winston Churchill, who had accomplished so much in life, is quoted as saying at the end, "I'm bored with it all!"
    3. Sometimes last words are incredibly clever and well thought out. Murderer James W. Rodgers was put in front of a firing squad in Utah and asked if he had a last request. He replied, "Bring me a bullet-proof vest."
  - D. But the "last words" of Jesus are significant in entirely different ways. For one thing, they are not (in one sense) **conclusive**. Jesus was neither reflecting on his

finished life, nor being poetic or clever, because unlike other men, he wasn't headed for the cold ground to await the resurrection at the last day. Jesus was alive! Resurrected and glorified! He was going to his eternal throne, where he sits even now at the right hand of the Father, making intercession for you and I.

1. So His last words were important because they were his final instructions given to his followers; his orders to his troops. In 2,000 years he has never altered or added to his orders; and still expects us to carry them out.
  2. So the question that arises is this: What implication does Christ's "Great Commission" hold for North Ridge Life Church?
- II. In other words, do you and I have any responsibility to participate in fulfilling the mission of the church? And if we do, what is our responsibility?
- A. Let's answer these questions by returning to the Great Commission in Matthew 28 and breaking it down. The first thing that we notice in verse 18 is Jesus' announcement that all authority in heaven and earth has been given to him.
1. Let me illustrate this by a meme I saw on Facebook with someone asking God the question, "Why do you allow violence in schools?"; to which God replies, "I'm not allowed in schools." Now this sounds logical since the Supreme Court banned prayer in public schools in 1962.
  2. But the problem with this thinking, though, is that the Bible says in Psalm 115 that God does "whatever he pleases". He is sovereign! No one tells God where he can and cannot go. The problem is not God's access to schools.
    - a) Remember, Jesus Christ has **all authority** over every government, school, church and family. Some may think they can sidestep his will and his justice, but will find themselves sorely mistaken one day very soon.
    - b) So if the problem is not with God, who is it with? The blame absolutely must lie with us! Meaning that if you want prayer in your school (or your kid's school), start praying in, and around, and for the school!
      - (1) Quite frankly, saying the government won't let you pray there is a cop out. The government cannot take away a right it didn't give.
      - (2) "Well they're not teaching my kid to pray, or leading them in prayer!" News Flash! That's not their job; it's yours, believing mom and dad!
- B. All of our authority, power, and the right to proclaim the message of Christ is rooted, not in us, or our government, but in the authority of Christ. When you are doing what he commanded you to do, you can rest assured his authority is there, backing you up. This is why Matthew 28 says, "Go, therefore.." Jesus is saying, "I have all authority, therefore you may go confidently where I send you, doing what I have commanded...**because** I have all authority."
1. But "go" is a kinetic word, implying movement and action. Unfortunately, though most ministry in America is based on saying "come and see" to the lost, as opposed to the church "going". We make our church services as appealing as can be in order to make the work of reaching the lost "easier". But an easy-going, comfortable, catering church produces easy-going, comfortable Christians who are no threat, and demand to be catered to.
    - a) As an example of this misguided thinking, I often hear sincere, well-meaning believers pray that the holy Spirit would draw people into our church by some irresistible force as they simply drive by the building.

- b) As nice as this sounds (and I am sure by grace it has happened on occasion), this is not the biblical method for sharing Jesus! We are not to somehow “hope and wish them in”, we are to go out and get them!
- 2. The phrase “Go and make disciples” in Matthew 28 indicates that some kind of “going” is necessary to the goal of making disciples. I think this means to go actively, with God glorifying, Kingdom-prioritized intention!
  - a) But where exactly do we go? Zimbabwe? Bulgaria? Maybe. But how about starting by just going where you’re already going anyway (school, work, your neighborhood) but going primarily for Christ’s purposes?
  - b) This means going to work, school, and your neighborhood prayerfully and intentionally in the hope of an opportunity to proclaim Christ’s message and make disciples. That mindset sure beats punching a clock!
- 3. However, this sometimes strikes believers as a daunting or intimidating task. I am not unsympathetic to that. I feel it too! But why do we feel this way? We should all love Jesus! Why then do we hesitate to speak openly of him? Name one other thing that we treasure that we are intimidated to speak openly about. Are you ashamed to speak about your spouse? Your kids? Some new treasure that you’ve acquired? Your team? Your hobby? Why then are we afraid to talk about Christ and what he’s done in and for us?
  - a) Maybe the reason is that we think there is a “right way” to bring him up and talk about him in conversation; some method or formula to follow, and we don’t want to mess it up.
    - (1) But I want talking about Jesus to be my public default setting. I want to point to him with my life and words organically and not in some forced or scripted way! I want to show others my greatest treasure!
    - (2) I figure that if you talk about Jesus simply because you love Jesus, you can’t mess that up! You don’t have to have all of the properly-worded theological answers, just a story of how he changed your life.
  - b) Sometimes we don’t talk about him because we’re fearful of being ridiculed as some kind of narrow-minded religious freak.
    - (1) I think the best way out of this trap is actually a renewed lifestyle of worship. In worship we fall more deeply in love with him.
    - (2) And the more you love someone, the more often and naturally you will speak of them. Remember when you first fell for your spouse? You couldn’t talk about anything else! But so many of us only have any thrill or romance with Jesus occasionally on Sunday morning, so like a marriage grown cold, there is no “top of mind awareness” of the one the old hymn calls “the lover of our soul”.
    - (3) ***Revelation 2:4 But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. 5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first.***
  - c) If you struggle in these areas, tell God to give you the desire and opportunity to be a shining light for his glory, and to infuse you with boldness! Even Jesus’ own apostles prayed for boldness in Acts 4 and God answered them, shaking the house where they gathered!

4. But others will not speak boldly of Jesus because they have no real relationship with him. They may go to church and accessorize their lives with religious talk and the appearance of morality. They may have prayed with a preacher for a little “fire insurance”, but Jesus is not the air they breathe. They do not live by every word that comes from the mouth of God.
    - a) People like these will never impact the world around them. They simply aren’t connected to God’s heart. They have their own business to take care of and can’t be bothered by the lost state of those around them.
    - b) If this is you, beware! You do not care about what Christ cares about, and do not think his thoughts because in truth you are still dead in your trespasses and sins, and alienated from the life of God!
- C. Also many in the church have reduced the proclamation of the Gospel to a sales scheme. The idea is that we get people to make a decision to “let Jesus come into their heart” as quickly as possible, so they can be marked as Christians and we can boast in increased numbers and successful church growth. No thought is given to look for any evidence of the Spirit’s transformative work in them.
1. The problem is that these methods are completely foreign to the New Testament. The Bible never encourages people to make a “decision for Christ” (as if we’re voting for King of Kings and Lord of Lords!).
  2. Jesus’ own constant call to the lost was simply, “Follow Me”. That means wherever he goes, I go. Whatever he says to do, I obey, Whatever he requires of me, I relinquish it. We are never once told to “let Jesus come into our hearts”. We are told to follow and obey him at all costs to ourselves.
  3. Therefore, the end goal of being a biblical witness can never be to simply get decisions; rather it Christ instructs us in Matthew 28 to make disciples.
    - a) A decision is an inherently unstable thing. I may choose vanilla today, and chocolate tomorrow. And how hard can it be to get people to decide for Jesus when hell is the alternative? If people believe hell is real, they will choose anything over hell! So being a witness becomes more about portraying hell as hot rather than portraying Christ as glorious!
    - b) Jesus never seeks a decision. He wants unconditional surrender. I do not believe you will not find a single instance in the gospels of Jesus inviting people to make a decision to “follow him”. It was always issued as a command; an imperative. Sometimes it was gentle, but this command was never given as an option. Peter, James and John, Matthew, the rich young ruler, the man in Luke 9...all of these were told to follow him. When they refused, Jesus made no further appeal. The refusal to answer Christ’s call to discipleship is first and foremost rebellious disobedience and an act of treason to the Most High.
- D. Another weakness is that decision only requires me to choose between Heaven and hell, or Christ and the world. Discipleship (unlike decision) requires me to choose between Christ and myself (my preferred idol). It demands the entire renunciation of my rights, my preferences, of my very life. Luke 14:33b “**...any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.**”
- III. Jesus said that we are to “go” and “make disciples”. That is the mission of our going and our proclaiming.

- A. When I was growing up, I was taught that first you make a decision for Christ, then you “get disciplined” so you can become a super-Christian! But that is not what the New Testament is proposing.
  - 1. Our goal, when we begin to talk to people about Jesus, is always (and from the beginning) to disciple them. A disciple is essentially a student or pupil.
  - 2. This requires that we proclaim Jesus, but that we engage in dialogue. We embrace and celebrate some good things in the culture, and roundly condemn others. All of this is in order to demonstrate the saving, redeeming, healing, restoring power of Jesus Christ. It is all teaching!
- B. This is why according to Matthew 10, we search for “persons of peace” - people whom the Holy Spirit is in one way or the other making ready for our message. But when we find such a person, what are we teaching or discipling them for? We are discipling them **toward** conversion, not merely decision.
- C. A decision is something I can do, not necessarily with any help from God. I simply weigh my alternatives and make a choice. Conversion is something only the Holy Spirit can do. He convicts people of their need for Jesus, illuminates the truth of his goodness to them, and works to transform them into his image (we are going to be talking a lot about conversion in the coming months). A decision doesn't make you a convert; but a convert always chooses Christ.
  - 1. This is why Jesus gave us additional defining commands in his Commission. He said we should baptize our disciples in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. When the people finally obey Christ's discipleship call we baptize them into the family of God as an outward sign of their inward change: their “conversion”. This demonstrates that they are dead to sin and alive to God.
  - 2. We then continue the work of “teaching them to observe” (or obey) all that Jesus commanded.
    - a) We do this by teaching them how to read and interpret the scriptures for themselves. They may need guidance and instruction and patience as they navigate God's word (don't we all?), but our goal is to see convert increasing and enthusiastically engaging scripture in their lives.
    - b) This also means to teach people to walk in accountability to their brothers and sisters in the body of Christ, the church. People who refuse to connect and participate in the Body of Christ can hardly be called a biblical Christian.
      - (1) We are commanded in Hebrews to assemble together. The idea of the saints being together is celebrated in almost every letter of the New Testament.
      - (2) Some TV, radio, and internet preachers, blogs and books may be helpful and good, but we were designed for mutual accountability. I need you. You need me. The Bible makes that clear.
- IV. There is no such thing as “easy-bake discipleship” or “discipleship for dummies” is always guaranteed to be messy and painstakingly slow by God's design. But it is well worth it.
  - A. If you and I want to have bologna sandwiches on Thursday afternoon, a \$3 pack of paper plates from Wal-Mart will do. But if you and I are hosting the queen, a couple presidents and prime ministers over, that simply won't do. We'll rent a

grand ballroom, invest in the finest porcelain and crystal money can buy, hire a world-class gourmet chef, dress in our finest to produce the best result.

1. The analogy is this. Many churches collect quick meaningless decisions like they're serving bologna on paper to the exalted King of the Universe.
  2. That's not how the apostles viewed the disciples he was producing. Here's what he said...
    - a) Paul referred to the Galatians as "my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!" (Gal. 4:19)
    - b) He told the Colossians that it was "Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ." (Col 1:28)
    - c) John told his friend Gaius, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth." (3 John 4)
- B. Discipleship and this business of conversion is a tough road, but isn't the joy of presenting mature, truth-walking disciples who have Christ formed in them to God at the final day a worthy goal? And never forget...there is no graduation ceremony scheduled in this life for disciples. To be a discipler, you must first be a disciple.
- V. One last thought. Jesus began the great commission in Matthew 28 with the assurance of his authority. He ends it with the promise of his presence. "And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."
- A. If you choose to take up the call of being a disciple who makes disciples, may you never forget that you are never alone. Where you go, Christ goes. When you are persecuted he bears the blows with you. When you are rejected, he remains by your side. When you are misunderstood, his Spirit will encourage you. When you are wrong he will graciously correct you. The one thing he will never do is forsake you.
  - B. So our mission as a church is to proclaim the message of Christ Jesus clearly, backed by Christ's authority and assured of his presence, in order to make disciples of all nations to present to him as the reward of his suffering in the final day.
  - C. It is a daunting task indeed, but one which cannot fail because it is the intent of almighty God to have a people for himself. "If God is for us who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31)