



CITY CHURCH
OF EAST NASHVILLE

The Intentional Pursuit Of Making Disciples

*And Jesus came and said to them,
“...Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...”*

Matthew 28:19 ESV

by
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Notes

INTRODUCTION

Matthew's Unique Twist on the Great Commission

Each of the gospel writers records in their own words what has come to be labeled the Great Commission - Jesus' departing mandate prior to ascension into heaven – but no record was like Matthew's.

Mark's record of Jesus' Great Commission (if we take 16:9-20 as authentic) reads, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation" (16:15).

Luke's record is similar. He records in his gospel that Jesus' parting mandate was to preach "repentance and forgiveness of sins in his name to all nations" (24:47) and in his Acts of the Apostles to "be witnesses" (1:8).

John's record of the Great Commission is more obscure than his fellow apostles: "As the father has sent me, even so I am sending you" (20:21).

But Matthew's record is unique. Mark, Luke and John laid emphasis to the charge of proclaiming the gospel throughout the world. Matthew, on the other hand, assumed obedience of God's people to proclaim the gospel and instead wrote of the church's mandate of what to do with the fruit of the gospel's proclamation: to make disciples.

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." (Matthew 28:18-20 ESV).

These two inseparable components of the Great Commission are the church's primary mandates which ought to give impetus and contour to the outward face she is called to put on at all times and in all places:

1. the mandate to EVANGELIZE (sow the seed of the gospel)
2. the mandate to MAKE DISCIPLES (mature the fruit of the gospel seed)

Jesus Hasn't Stopped Making Disciples

Isn't it often assumed that when Jesus ascended, his ministry of making disciples came to an end? But did it really?

It's very interesting how Jesus prepares his disciples for the end of his earthly ministry. John's gospel is especially replete with instructions to the disciples regarding Jesus' leaving.

"I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you." (John 14:18 ESV)

But isn't Jesus going away? How will he come to the disciples while at the same time going from them? The verses surrounding John 14:18 clearly show in what way Jesus will come to the disciples.

16 "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, 17 even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you." (John 14:16-17 ESV)

25 "These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. 26 But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you." (John 14:25-26 ESV)

Jesus is teaching the disciples that even though he will leave them at his ascension, he will remain with them in the sending of the Holy Spirit to dwell with them and to teach them. Jesus tells his disciples how this empowering relationship with him via the Holy Spirit will be inaugurated in the book of Acts:

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:8 ESV)

This is exactly what the prophets Ezekiel and Jeremiah anticipated in the days to come when the new covenant of God's grace would be poured out on the heels of Christ's death, resurrection and ascension.

25 "I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. 26 And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey his rules." (Ezekiel 36:25-27 ESV)

31 “Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, 32 not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. 33 But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 34 And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” (Jeremiah 31:31-34 ESV)

So very much could be said about these prophecies of the advent of the new covenant. But suffice it to say they dovetail with Jesus’ words to the twelve that although he would physically depart from them he would never leave them as “orphans” by the sending of the Holy Spirit who would “cause” them to obey with new hearts of “flesh” and to be “careful to obey his rules” (revealed will).

It is true then. Jesus continues to disciple his own to this day. He sends his Holy Spirit to his sons and daughters, indwelling each one by the Spirit, making them his very own temple (1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:19-20). The Spirit’s dwelling with each of God’s children insures that the work of redemption begun in them will reach it’s glorious completion (Philippians 1:6) because God, by his Spirit, gives to every member of his redeemed family the power “to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13). Amazing! God, by his Spirit in those whom Christ has redeemed, discipulates them to maturity by unfailingly giving them the will to obey him and the resurrection power to do his works throughout their earthly journey. Now you can see what Jesus meant when he challenged his disciples with the Great Commission, “*And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age*” (Matthew 28:20 ESV).

The Great Commission is for Us Too

Many raise the questions, “Isn’t the Great Commission just for those eleven disciples that Jesus addressed? How do I know that Jesus directed the same mandate to me?”

First, let’s answer this question by staying with the same passage of Scripture. The main verb Matthew 28:18-20 is an imperative or command: “make disciples”. The imperative is followed by two participles (they clarify or further explain the main verb): “baptizing” and “teaching”. Without getting into a technical explanation of what all this means, it is clear that the eleven disciples were charged with

the mandate to make disciples which involves two key dimensions - to baptize (inclusion into the local body of believers by this sacrament of God's covenant of grace) and teaching (maturing the believers in that local body by the ministry of the Word). So, what were they commanded to teach? They were to teach "all" that Jesus had "commanded." What did Jesus just command? Jesus just commanded them to make disciples. See the connection? What was passed on to the disciples was in like manner passed on to us. The eleven were to pass on the mandate to make disciples just as Jesus had passed the mandate on to them.

We see this same mandate throughout the epistles. The maturity of God's people is a venture the entire church is to embark on. God has structured the process of our spiritual maturation or sanctification to best flourish in the context of each of us being ministered to by every other brother and sister in Christ's body. That is to say, we contribute to another's growth as a disciple when we minister to them the gifts God has given to us and the truth of God's Word.

One prime example of this is seen from the Paul's letter to the Ephesians in chapter four. In verses one to sixteen Paul makes the case that Christ has given gifts to his people and his gifted people are to use those gifts to "equip the saints" (4:12). Then notice what Paul says is the fruit, or effect, of ministering God-given gifts to one another:

- the fruit of "building up the body of Christ" (v. 12);
- the fruit of bringing the "unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God" (v. 13);
- the fruit of bringing others "to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (v. 13)
- the fruit of others being "no longer...children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes" (v. 14)
- the fruit of "grow[ing] up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ" (v. 15)

Paul then brings this crescendo of the fruits of being ministered to by one another to this amazing conclusion:

"when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love (v. 16 ESV)

How are we to contribute to the discipling or maturing of our brothers and sisters in Christ? By each of us doing our part; by ministering to each other all that God has given us.

God's Grand Scheme of Discipling

God is committed to disciple every person who responds by grace through faith to the message of the gospel. In other words when, by the work of God's Spirit, a conversion takes place in any person, the same Holy Spirit begins the process of maturing or discipling that person. To accomplish that process God has commanded the church to join with him in discipling others.

For centuries theologians have referred to the resources necessary to this process of our growth in Christ as the "means of grace". These "means" are channels or avenues which God has ordained to create a greenhouse of growth. If these means are responsibly offered and ministered by the church and those in the church avail themselves of those means, growth to maturity will be the effect. But if such a greenhouse is not "constructed" by the church or neglected as a growth environment in which to "live" by those in the church then maturation in Christ will be compromised.

Two key means of grace by which God grows us are the Word of God and redemptive relationships. When any individual experiences the habitual ministry of the Word (read, studied, taught, preached) and the practice of the gospel of mercy and grace toward one another then they will experience a growing maturity in Christ. That is why any church that is a wise and faithful steward of the ministry of the Word and redemptive relationships is seen as doing a fairly effective job of making disciples. In other words, any church that does a credible job of ministering the whole counsel of God within a highly relational body will do a better than average job of discipling.

Although that is commended, most churches do not do an *excellent* job of fulfilling Christ's command to make disciples. The challenge here is not to be content with doing a fairly effective job of making disciples - that is of creating a greenhouse for maturation in Christ - but to be committed to doing an excellent job.

Doing An Excellent Job of Making Disciples

There are at least two fundamental reasons why most churches are not committed to doing an excellent job of making disciples: 1) they have not identified, let alone agreed on, the primary characteristics of a disciple; and 2) because they haven't defined a disciple, they are not, in fact they cannot be, intentional in making disciples. How can you make something that you have not defined? And how can a church be intentional in her disciple-making if the disciple makers aren't on the same page in defining what a disciple looks like?

In the New Testament we have more than one context in which disciples were referenced. Although the Scriptures speak of the

disciples of John the Baptist (Matthew 9:14; Mark 2:18) and the disciples of the Pharisees (Luke 5:33), Jesus spoke of his disciples in a way unlike any other context of his time. It was common to refer to disciples in the Greco-Roman world of Jesus' time as those who followed a teacher or Rabbi. But Jesus spoke of his disciples to mean far more than those who were simply his followers. Jesus always added torque to the common perception of what defined or earmarked a disciple.

At key intervals in his ministry Jesus made it a habit to qualify the traits or characteristics of his disciples, e.g. if you are like the following "you are truly my disciples" or if you are not like the following "you cannot be my disciples". If we can understand what Jesus is teaching about the characteristics of his disciples then we can agree on what kind of disciple we are trying to make, and if we can understand what kind of disciple we trying to make then we can walk in unison in our intentionality to make disciples.

The next section in this material will explain the particular characteristics Jesus taught his disciples should exhibit in order for us to grasp what it is we are attempting others to experience and exhibit as Christ followers. This will increase our intentionality in making disciples and our excellence in the pursuit of Christ's mandate. Here is a summary of what Jesus called his disciples to be:

A. Disciples are Called to DIE (to self) that they might LIVE (for God)...

1. Which is the Sum of Discipleship

B. Disciples are Called to Relationship with GOD

2. Relationship w/GOD THE SPIRIT...with whom they walk as their one holy fruit bearer

3. Relationship w/GOD THE SON...with whom they walk as their one true love

4. Relationship w/GOD THE FATHER...with whom they walk as their one eternal treasure

C. Disciples are Called to Relationship with OTHERS

5. Relationship to THE CHURCH...to whom they serve the debt of love and the gifts of the Spirit

6. Relationship to THE WORLD...to whom they serve words and deeds of the gospel of grace

D. Disciples are Called to Relationship with TRUTH...

7. From which they feast to be complete & equipped for every good work