**Discipleship Made Simple**

Matthew 28:18-20

**If I were to ask you, “What is your life mission?” How would you respond?** That’s a critical question. Without purpose you lack direction, focus, meaning and significance. As the saying goes, “If you don’t know where you are going, any old road will get you there…”

Fortunately, Jesus delivered clear, concise marching orders to the Disciples just prior to his ascension. If you are a Christ follower, his orders stand today. If you are not a Christian, but you are looking for purpose that will matter for eternity, you’ve come to the right place. This message is for you.

So, here we go. Listen closely to Christ’s last words; they are called The Great Commission:

 **Matthew 28:19 (ESV)** **“Go… and make disciples *[learners]* of all nations…”**

“Make ***disciples***,” not “make ***Christians***.” Christ-followers are called “disciples” **256** times in the NT, and “Christians” only **three** times. That’s why I titled today’s talk “*Discipleship* Made Simple,” not “*Christianity* Made Simple.”

**INTRODUCTION** In verse 18,Jesus introduces our mission with an extraordinary—some would say audacious—personal claim…

**Matthew 28:18** **(ESV)** [Jesus] “**All** **authority** in heaven and earth has been given to me.”

Jesus places himself at the center of all things, seen and unseen. In the NT the apostle Paul wrote that Christ *created* everything and *holds together* everything:

**Colossians 1:16-17 (ESV)** For by [Christ] **all things were created**, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him **all things hold together.**

**Get it?** Jesus is #1; he created everything & he holds everything together; everything exists for him; and he rules everything. Now, that’s a breath-taking claim.

**Question: So, why would Jesus introduce our marching orders with this astounding claim?**

**Answer: Because you pursue and fulfill your mission under *his* Supreme Authority,** which has *two* implications:

***First*, he has the right to tell you what to do.** “All authority has been given to me…” *so go!* Don’t stand around, *go!* And our response is, **“Lord, if you say go, I go…” *because disciples are people under God’s authority.***

***Second*, his authority & power are greater than any competing authority & power that may come against you.** This means you need not fear obeying him; You are on eternity’s winning team. Nothing great is accomplished without opposition.

**THE GREAT COMMISSION** What specifically does Jesus call us to do?

**Matthew 28:19-20a (ESV)** [Jesus] “Go therefore *[because he* *is the Supreme Authority]* and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”

**Verses 19 and 20 have a clear structure:**

* ***A main command:*** **Make Disciples of all nations.**
* ***Three verbs:* (1) Go; (2) Baptize; (3) Teach.**

**So *all* Christ-followers’ mission is to *go* and *make* disciples of all “nations” (=*ethnicities*).** Several observations of the obvious:

**First**, this is the ***Master’s Plan of Evangelism***, a brilliant strategy to change the world. Jesus taught it and he modeled it to the disciples. **[*Reminder:* Jesus is the most intelligent man in the history of the world.]**

**Second**, the goal of his strategy is making ***more disciples and better disciples.***

***Question***: **Can you name *who* discipled you?** If you can’t, that’s okey. [Mike Lanning, Ray Nethery, John Wimber]

**Third**, the core of Christ’s strategy is this: ***Make disciples who make disciples.*** As we shall see, a mature disciple makes disciples.

***Question***: **Can you name the people *you* have discipled?** [I’m discipling three leaders in France!]

**HOW ARE DISCIPLES MADE?** The Great Commission is simple and obvious, yet still, there is much confusion about it.

If a disciple is defined merely as someone who is biblically literate and trained to evangelize, the disciple-making *process* will emphasize a western education methodology—classes, lectures, videos, programs, and the like. **This is based on the assumption that** ***the accumulation of knowledge leads to mastering any topic*,** be it history, biology, philosophy *or Christianity*.

**But Christ’s method is more radical, defining discipleship as a process in which *every sphere of life is conformed to Christ’s character*—body, soul, mind, spirit, emotions, economics, art, sexuality, relationships—*everything*.**

Paul wrote that we are called to be “imitators of God” (**Eph. 5:1**), a people who “put on Christ” (**Rom. 13:14**). **A disciple aspires to become what the teacher is. Paul had become what Jesus is in body, soul, mind, spirit, emotions, economics, art, sexuality, relationships—everything.** So Paul could say, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (**1 Cor. 11:1**; also see **4:16**).

And as Jesus demonstrated, this sort of character transformation can only be accomplished in community, through authentic, transparent relationships. **All significant change takes place in the context of relationships.**

**Timothy Keller:** “The essence of becoming a disciple is, to put it colloquially, becoming like the people we hang out with the most. Christian community is more than just a supportive fellowship; it is an alternative society. And it is through this alternate human society that God shapes us into who and what we are” (*Center Church,* p 311).

Jesus spent the majority of his three-year public ministry with twelve ordinary men, and within that group he prioritized three. He selected the disciples, stayed with them, expected obedience from them, gave himself to them, showed them how to live, entrusted them with work assignments, checked up on them, *and expected them to reproduce the life he gave them in others.* Relationship was the Method of the Master.

For their part, the disciples were passionately devoted to their Rabbi, noting everything he said and did. They listened, watched, imitated and obeyed him so as to become like him. It was an intense, intentional, *personal* system of education. When Jesus commissioned the Disciples to make disciples who make disciples, they knew *exactly* what he meant because he had done it to them! “What you take takes you.”

**Matthew 28:19-20** is simple and uncomplicated: *We are called to be disciples (learners) of Christ who go and make disciples of Christ, by immersing them in an intensely intimate* ***experience of the Trinity*** *(Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), teaching and modeling* ***obedience to Christ’s commands****, and sending them out to* ***reproduce Christ’s life in others****.*

**THREE CHARACTERISTICS How do you recognize a disciple?** Jesus described three distinguishing characteristics of a disciple:

**Matthew 28:19-20a (ESV)** [Jesus] “**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, **teaching them to** **observe** all that I have commanded you.”

A mature disciple, Jesus said, (1) goes out because he or she is **sent** out; (2) is baptized and **baptizes** others; (3) is taught and **teaches** others to know *and do* all that Jesus commanded. A few observations about each of these characteristics…

**1. GOING: You go out because you are sent out by the Supreme Authority of the universe.** This is the missionary call of the church, and it is for *every* Christ-follower. It doesn’t mean you have to go to the farthest place on the planet! But it does mean going out to family, friends, neighbors—anyone you may encounter in life. It’s an uncomplicated and unambiguous command. At Pentecost Jesus said,

**Acts 1:8 (ESV)** [Jesus] “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.”

**Is there anything more anxiety producing than being a witnesses?** There’s a reason for our insecurities and fears: Nothing arouses opposition and, dare I say, persecution, like telling others about what Christ has done in our lives. Yet this is *the* primary reason that we were “left behind” after Jesus’ ascension.

You might say, “Kevin, if you ask me to teach Sunday School, I can do that; serve at the local homeless shelter, I can do that; be a *fairly* good, ethical, caring person, I may get a passing grade there. But share what Jesus means to me with a family member, friend, neighbor, or work associate? Yikes!”

**2. BAPTIZED & BAPTIZING: Disciples are baptized into the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—and they in turn baptize others. What does getting wet have to do with being a disciple?** *Well, everything*…

Baptism signifies many things, but I believe that what Jesus primarily had in mind in The Great Commisison is through baptism you enter into **(1) fellowship with the Trinity and (2) the community of the church.**

**The Trinity is the first and perfect community who created us to be in relationship with him.** He didn’t *need* you; he *wanted* you—**you are a product of God’s love**.

**Illustration**: Rena: **“I am a product of my parents’ love.”** *Everyone wants to know that they are a product of love.* Don’t you? So here’s the good news: The triune God wouldn’t keep love to himself. **God chose you as the object of his love.**

**In baptism we are welcomed into the family of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God as Trinity is the first community.** *The way I see it is that the circle of the Trinity has been opened, and we are welcomed in.* **What does this say about being a disciple?** Simple: **When we come to Christ, we join God’s family!**

But there’s a second part to this. In the early church there was a saying, **“He cannot have God as his Father who does not have the church for his mother.” (Cyprian, 3rd century).** A disciple wouldn’t think of attempting to mature in Christ apart from the nurture of the church, no more than a Boy Scout would pursue becoming an Eagle apart from his Troop.

**3. TAUGHT & TEACHES: Disciples are taught to obey *all* that Jesus commanded—and teach others to obey.** To look at the contemporary church you would think that Jesus said, “Teach them to *study* everything that I have commanded; teach them to hold classes where we take lots of notes about my commands; teach them the right doctrine so that they believe the right things.”

Folks, that’s *not* what Jesus said; he said, **“We make disciples by teaching them to *obey* all that I have commanded you.”** Is biblical study a critical step to obedience? Absolutely! Listen to John’s words:

**1 John 2:4-5 (ESV)** Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected.

Are you dedicated to the mission of teaching people to *observe* all that Jesus commanded?Look at that word “obey” in verse 20. Other translations say “keep or observe.” In other words, **align your way of life to Jesus’ commands**. Make your thoughts and will, your values and ambitions, consistent with the Jesus’ life by **coming under his *shaping influence*.**

Western Christians are guilty of focusing on **abundance without obedience.** **But there is no abundance without obedience.** It’s the truth you know ***and do*** that sets you free.

**CLOSING:** Finally**,** Jesus added this empowering and encouraging remark. Just because something is simple it isn’t easy.

**Matthew 28:20b (ESV)** [Jesus]“And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Jesus concludes The Great Commission where he started it: With himself at the center. His promise to be with us is more than a comforting presence. His presence means all of the authority and power of heaven is at our disposal to accomplish his mission on earth. That’s a promise. He guides, provides, empowers…

**Acts 1:8** “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and **you will be my witnesses…”**

**What he calls us to do, he empowers and equips us to fulfill. Our part is to act, now…**

**ACTION POINTS: I would be remiss if I did not call you to act on what you have heard today. So…**

1. **Pray NOW to commit to Christ—you are a product of God’s love!**
2. **Get baptized, NOW!**
3. **Pray NOW to be a Great Commission Disciple—You are given a mission that will matter for eternity!**
4. **Pray NOW to be filled with the HS—You are empowered by Christ’s presence to fulfill his mission!**