

On a Mission

Matthew 28:16-20

Late on Monday night, June 5, 1944, **General Dwight Eisenhower** was pacing in his trailer and smoking furiously as he weighed the decision for the Normandy Landings and Operation Overlord. He finally gave the “go” and over 24,000 airborne troops landed in France soon after midnight on June 6. 120,000 more soldiers would join them at 0630, transported and escorted by nearly 7,000 naval vessels. By the end of D-Day allied casualties totalled over 10,000 - with 4,414 confirmed dead. But the sacrifice of those brave soldiers established a beachhead from which the Allied invasion would progress all the way to Berlin over the next eleven months.

Led by President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill, **the purpose** was clear: to liberate Europe from Hitler and the tyranny of the Nazis. **The power** behind the 1.5 million troops amassed in England was overwhelming, even against the military might of the Germans. Allied air supremacy had already cleared the way of the feared Luftwaffe, and naval operations had nearly cleared the waters of German U-boats. The sleeping giant of America had been roused by Japan and now the full might of the United States was alongside Britain, Canada and France to attempt the largest, most complicated invasion in history.

The purpose was clear. The power was overwhelming. **The promise** of support from Russia in the east rounded out the Allied forces. And Eisenhower would guide the war according to specific **priorities** and objectives until they achieved total surrender from the Germans on May 8, 1945. By the end of operations in both Europe and Asia a total of over 400,000 U.S. soldiers gave their lives to accomplish this mission and bring an end to the war. Just under that number were lost by the British. The cost was tremendous, but every one of them would say it was worth the sacrifice for the sake of the mission!

Like the soldiers on D-Day we have a clear purpose, overwhelming power behind us, the promise of support and specific priorities to guide us. Sacrifices are being made all over the world every day to accomplish our mission - the cost is high, but the mission is worth it. The enemy is gaining ground and his mission is to steal and kill and destroy. We know that Jesus is building His church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. But the war is still raging and we are in the midst of it.

Let's look briefly at three guiding principles and then focus our time this morning on our four priorities as a church on mission.

First of all, **our purpose is clear**. When the disciples saw the risen Jesus in verse 17 they did the appropriate thing - they worshiped him.

- **The Purpose of our Mission - to Glorify Jesus Christ**

*“Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus has directed them. And when they saw him **they worshiped him**, but some doubted.” Matthew 28:16-17*

This was the ultimate purpose of everything Jesus did - to gradually but steadily **reveal His glory** and invite all people to worship Him as the Lord of all.

- He healed diseases and drove out demons;
- He calmed a storm and walked on water;
- He raised the dead and fed thousands from a bag lunch.
- Finally, as the ultimate proof - he promised that he would rise again and on the third day he walked out of the tomb.

The purpose of our mission is to bring glory and honor to Jesus Christ - to invite the people around us and all over the world to worship Him the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Second, **the power for our mission** comes from Jesus Himself - to whom all authority in heaven and on earth has been given.

- **The Power for our Mission - Jesus' Authority as Lord of All**

*“And Jesus came and said to them, ‘**All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.**’” Matthew 28:18*

Jesus Christ is Lord. He always was Lord - all things were created by him and for him. But for a time, during his earthly life, he laid down his glory taking the very nature of a servant. The resurrection restored to Jesus the fullness of His eternal glory and confirmed his absolute divine authority over all things. **That is the basis for our mission and the power that fills us as we go.**

During his earthly ministry Jesus gave some of his authority to his followers so they could heal people, drive out demons and preach with authority. After he ascended into heaven, Jesus poured out His Spirit on all of His followers so we all have power from on high to accomplish the mission on which we've been sent out.

We have a clear purpose, divine power and third, we have **the most comforting promise** - that Jesus will be with us to the end of the age.

- **The Promise for our Mission - Jesus' Presence with us**

*“And behold, **I am with you always, to the end of the age.**” Matthew 28:20b*

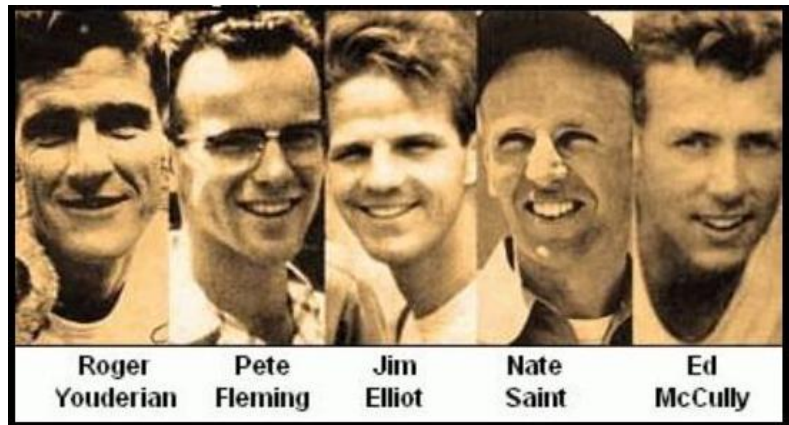
Jesus did not promise a trouble-free life. In fact, he promised that in this world we WILL have trouble. But we can take heart because Jesus has overcome this world and He is always with us - no matter what we are individually called to go through.

Jim Elliot led a team of four other young men to Ecuador in 1952. Their **purpose** was to bring glory to Jesus Christ by preaching the gospel to a tribe that had not yet been reached with the good news. They were filled with **power** and boldness from the Holy Spirit, guided along in many ways as they made contact with the natives and designed their strategy to engage them. And they held onto the **promises** of God - not that any of them were guaranteed safety but that Jesus was with them and their loved ones no matter what.

Jim Elliot, Ed McCully, Pete Fleming, Nate Saint and Roger Youderian spent three years getting acclimated to Ecuador and doing outreach among the Quechua Indians. Then they shifted their attention to the Huaorani people deeper in the jungle. Their first contact seemed positive so they flew in to greet the tribe again. This time the five men were ambushed and all five were killed with spears.

Jim had written in his diary a few years before:

[Add image of Ecuador 5 in PPT w quote: "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." Jim Elliot, 1949]



Elliot and his courageous friends knew **their purpose** was not to build a life of comfort for themselves. Jim once said, "I will not get fat leaning on a pulpit." (That is one of my guiding principles as I have now entered my 40s.) The team knew **their power** came from the Lord. And they knew, above all, that **God's promises** for them had more to do with eternity than with this very short life. So they joyfully gave up their lives for the sake of the bigger mission.

Jim's wife Elisabeth and Nate's sister Rachel later went back to the Huaorani people and most of the tribe eventually committed themselves to Jesus.

Those three principles provide the basis for accomplishing the four priorities of a church on mission. Jim and his team, Elisabeth and Rachel show us the four priorities of the great commission: going, preaching, calling for commitment and training believers to follow Jesus.

Let's look at these priorities as we walk through the concluding verses of Matthew's gospel - a passage often called The Great Commission.

It has often been pointed out that the primary command in the great commission is not to GO but to make disciples.

The Great Commission

Make Disciples of All Nations

- Going
- Baptizing them...
- Teaching them to obey

Going is one of three participles that clarify HOW we are to make disciples. But the commission from Jesus is to make disciples of all nations. I have combined this passage in Matthew 28 with the parallel passage in Mark 16 to include the priority of preaching the Gospel.

4 Priorities for a Disciple-Making Church

- Going to All Nations
- Preaching the Good News
- Calling for Commitment
- Training Believers to Obey

“Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.” Mark 16:15

If we are to accomplish the mission Jesus has given us, we must be a church on the move. The first priority is to GO.

4 Priorities for a Disciple-Making Church

- ***Going*** to All Nations

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.” Matthew 28:19a

The early church did not obey this command. ***Instead of spreading out to share the gospel, they huddled together and stayed in Jerusalem.*** The church was growing rapidly. They were all together, sharing everything and enjoying an extended season of worship and blessing from the Lord. No one wanted to leave and miss out on all of that.

So in Acts 8:1 it says,

4 Priorities for a Disciple-Making Church

- ***Going*** to All Nations

“And there arose that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.” Acts 8:1

This parallels what happened in Genesis. Remember how God had commissioned Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth and subdue it? But instead of scattering out to fill the earth, remember what they did? They gathered together to build a tower in a place called Babel - all to make a name for themselves... And so God confused their languages at **the tower of Babel** and they had no choice but to scatter out and fill the earth.

Similarly, ***the Lord used persecution to scatter the early believers*** and get them going on their mission to make disciples of all nations.

We see a similar trend today. Instead of embracing this mission to go into all the world, most of us prefer to huddle together in the comfort and blessing of our gatherings here in the U.S. A few respond to the call to go forth to the nations - and we have several in our church family who have done just that. But most of us in this room have not yet followed this directive in a long term way.

Several people have asked me and Kristin what ***our long term plans are with Oakwood*** and Florida. And I'll share up front what I told the search team and the elders last year in the interview process. We are committed to serving here at Oakwood for at least five years total, as that seems wise for our family and for the church. But beyond that we can't make any firm commitments because it's entirely possible the Lord will call us to go somewhere out in the world to help fulfill the Great Commission.

We believe that time is short and the needs in the world are desperate. There is no doubt that the mission remains incomplete largely because the Great Commission remains largely un-obeyed. If the Lord calls us to go to the Middle East or to southeast Asia so that lost and dying people can hear the good news - we are prepared to answer that call.

So over the next few years one of the factors that will lead us to stay longer at Oakwood will be the fact that we are ***effectively raising up and sending out missionaries*** into the global harvest. Not all of us are called to leave the United States and bring the gospel to the nations. But some of us are. ***And those of us who stay can only be obedient to Jesus and stay because we pray for, support and assist those who go.*** We who stay need the missionaries who go as much as those who go need us who stay.

To be ***Obedient***, those who stay need the ones who go

To be ***Effective***, those who go need the ones who stay

Do you see the vital connection? All believers have been commanded by the Lord Jesus Christ to GO and make disciples of all nations. That doesn't mean we should all leave our houses and families and head to Zimbabwe, India or Afghanistan. If all believers became missionaries who would provide the support? Who would continue to reach out here in America? But if we are to be faithful to the mission Jesus has given us, then some of us have to go!

It is significant that Jesus put "going" first in the Great Commission. All of us are called to "go" in the sense of leaving our old lives behind and embracing a new life on mission with Jesus. As we saw last week, we go on mission because **we ARE ambassadors for Jesus.**

Our identity as His messengers is what motivates and directs our activity. This is WHO WE ARE. A true Christ follower can't help but honor Him and represent Him.

Wherever we go, we bring Jesus with us, joining God in His ongoing work of reconciling people to Himself. First, we go. As we go, we preach the Gospel. That is the next priority for a disciple-making church.

4 Priorities for a Disciple-Making

- ***Preaching*** the Good News that Jesus is Lord

*“Go therefore and **make disciples** of all nations.” Matthew 28:19*

*“Go into all the world and **proclaim the gospel** to the whole creation.” Mark 16:15*

We cannot make disciples without proclaiming the Gospel. One of the most misquoted and misunderstood statements in American Churchianity is attributed (wrongly) to Saint Francis of Assisi - **“Preach the gospel at all times; if necessary use words.”** I link to an article in the church blog that argues Francis never said anything like this, and that he was actually a very bold and prolific gospel preacher.

The fact is that evangelism is by definition a verbal exercise. ***We have not shared the gospel until we have explained what Jesus has done using words.***

To preach the Gospel it's necessary to *use words.*

The word is **PROCLAIM**. The idea in the Bible was of ***a herald who would loudly announce good news.*** Before CNN and the evening news, even before radio and the telegraph, news travelled at the speed of a guy running or riding a horse. And it was announced by a herald who shouted at the top of his voice in an open public space.

If you told an early Christian to preach the gospel without words he would look at you like you were from outer space. The word “preach” meant proclaim, declare, announce - or SHOUT - much as it does today, in fact. So it can't be done without words.

And this is our great privilege - to speak the words by which deaf ears begin to hear, hard hearts are softened and blind eyes are opened. There is power in the proclamation of the gospel. It is the Word of God proclaimed that “is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.”

4 Priorities for a Disciple-Making Church

- ***Preaching*** the Good News that Jesus is Lord

*“Go therefore and **make disciples** of all nations.” Matthew 28:19*

*“Go into all the world and **proclaim the gospel** to the whole creation.” Mark 16:15*

The gospel is the seed that must be planted in the soil of a heart. In the proper conditions that seed will germinate and begin to take root and grow up. But ***expecting to see people get saved without proclaiming the gospel is like expecting a harvest without planting any seeds.***

We need to reclaim these priorities as followers of Jesus and as a disciple-making church. We need to be a church that goes - whether it's across the room, across the yard or across the ocean. We need to be a church that proclaims the gospel - not obnoxiously or seeking to offend anyone on purpose. But boldly, faithfully, consistently explaining the wonderful news that Jesus Christ is Lord.

The Gospel message is simply this: ***Jesus Christ is Lord.*** The Rabbi who lived 2,000 years ago and taught about loving your neighbor and stuff - He is the Lord. He is the Creator God. He is the sovereign ruler, the King over all things. And this King of Kings gave up his life for you and for me. He died on the cross, taking the punishment that you and I deserve. The Lord. The King Himself died for us.

But death could not hold him. The grave could not keep him from rising again. Jesus rose again on the third day in eternal triumph over death and sin and hell. That is the most life-changing good news you will ever hear. And it is the most powerful and important news you can ever share with anyone. Jesus is Lord! Won't you commit your life to Him?

That is our third priority as a Disciple-Making Church - calling for commitment to Jesus as Lord.

4 Priorities for a Disciple-Making Church

- Calling for **Commitment** to Jesus as Lord

“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

Your Bible might have a note there that it is more literally “baptizing them **INTO** the name of the Father...” Baptism is the rite of entry into the family of believers. Baptism does not save a person but it represents what happens at the moment of saving faith.

You go underwater as a sign that your old life, your old self has died and was buried with Jesus. And you come up from the water as a sign that you have a new life now in Christ - that you came to life with Him. In that sense the believer is baptized INTO Christ.

Baptism represents Union with God.

*“Do you not know that all of us who have been **baptized into Christ Jesus** were baptized into his death? ...For if we have been **united with him** in a death like his, we shall certainly be **united with him** in a resurrection like his.” Romans 6:3-5*

Before you committed your heart and life to Jesus ***you were OUTSIDE of the life of God.*** You were on your own. But at the moment that you cried out to Jesus in faith, you were brought into the very life of God - you were welcomed into fellowship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Listen to these excerpts from Mere Christianity (p. 153, 167):

“Good things as well as bad, you know, are caught by a kind of good infection. If you want to get warm you must stand near a fire: if you want to be wet you must get into the water. If you want joy, power, peace, eternal life, ***you must get close to, or even into, the thing that has them.*** They are not a sort of prize which God could, if He chose, just hand out to anyone.”
C.S. Lewis

“They are a great fountain of energy and beauty spurting up at the very center of reality. If you are close to it, the spray will wet you: if you are not, you will remain dry. ***Once a man is united to God, how could he not live forever?*** Once a man is separated from God, what can he do but wither and die?” C.S. Lewis

“Christ says, ‘Give me All. I don’t want so much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work: I want you. I have not come to torment your natural self, but to kill it. No half-measures are any good... ***I will give you a new self instead.*** In fact, ***I will give you Myself.*** my own will shall become yours.” C.S. Lewis

God cannot give you love, power, peace, joy, security or eternal life apart from Himself. **All of God’s gifts are a package deal** - they come together or not at all. And the only way to get those gifts is to be united with the Giver. Baptism acts out how that transformation takes place - it involves ***an act of dying and an act of being reborn.***

This is our joyful privilege as ambassadors of Jesus. ***We invite people to come and die so they can truly live.*** You have to let go of your old life to take hold of the new life only Jesus can give you. And really that makes perfect sense. ***God is defined by holiness*** - He is the essence of perfection, utterly untainted by any sin or defilement.

We are a mess of sin - pride, selfishness, envy, lust, greed - all manner of depravity. If life and joy and eternal peace are found only IN GOD, how could such sinful, wicked people ever receive them? How could we ever be united with a holy God? The answer is - we never could. The evil in us would keep us from ever getting close to the Lord. To approach the Lord in our current, sinful state, would be ***like flying the space shuttle directly into the sun.*** You and I would be instantly vaporized by the all surpassing glory of God. All sinners would be.

So the only way to reach the joy and peace and life that are found in God is to have all of your sin removed and to be transformed into a truly holy person. To complete the analogy, it

would be like suddenly **becoming Super Man** - so that you could fly up to or even into the sun and instead of being burned up, you would be energized by it.

This is why we must call people to commitment. It is not enough to just tell them, "God loves you and Jesus died for you." That's true but it stops short of actually giving them hope. Yes, God loves you. Yes, Jesus died for you. But that will not help you until you surrender your life to Him. You are no more ready to stand before God in judgment than you are to fly into the sun.

You must first let God transform you, by the blood of Jesus, and make you into a new creation in Christ. Bring your old life to the Lord, lay it down before Him as an act of faith and surrender and, in return, Jesus will give you HIMSELF. He will give you a new life and as you live it you will discover that the life he gave you was His own. Die to yourself so you can truly start to live.

One more priority to practice as a disciple-making church.

4 Priorities for a Disciple-Making Church

- Training Believers **to Obey** Jesus as Lord

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations... teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." Matthew 28:19-20

Our mission is not to win converts but to make disciples. More specifically, we are to train up fully devoted followers of Christ, teaching them to observe all that He has commanded. That is no small assignment! We baptize them as a sign of their full commitment and then we enlist them in a training program to help them grow in obedience to ALL that Jesus left us by way of instruction.

All of that instruction, by the way, is right there in your Bible. The New Testament is the teaching from Jesus, the fulfillment of the Old Testament which remains relevant for us today in the light of the cross.

And we have not taught believers to obey all of Jesus' commands until we help them obey the ones included in the Great Commission itself!

At my home church in Chicago we have a Japanese congregation, much as we have a Spanish-speaking congregation that meets here at Oakwood. The Pastor of that Japanese church - **Pastor Hiro** - heard the Gospel from a friend and gave his life to Christ in his early twenties. His friend brought him - the very next day - to the train station in Tokyo to immediately start telling others the good news he had just come to understand and accept. **Less than 24 hours after becoming a Christian, Hiro was in a public place proclaiming the Gospel.**

That is “teaching them to obey.” That is how to train a disciple, not just win a convert. Often we hide new believers, trying to keep them cloistered up with only strong Christians all the time. But new believers are actually the most likely to have connections with NON-believers and their early joy in the Lord is an opportunity to take advantage of!

Our mission is not to win converts but **to train disciple-makers.**

We have not trained up a disciple of Jesus until we **help him or her become a disciple-maker.** We must be teaching our kids and young people how to boldly and clearly share the gospel and then follow up to train a new believer. A sign of a healthy, growing believer is spiritual grand-children and great-grand-children. When the people you led to faith in Jesus have led others to Christ who have led others to Christ - that is the WIN!

Disciples must make disciples who make disciples. The Great Commission is an exhortation to reproduce - **to multiply.** The early church exploded because the apostles did just that. They did not just add converts to the family of believers. They multiplied leaders who multiplied disciples. In short, they were effective in multiplying disciple-makers.

If you want one short, simple book to summarize how to do that, pick up ***The Master Plan of Evangelism*** from the church lobby. That is one of the best, most helpful books ever written.

Think about this as we close. **There are four stages of growth for every follower of Jesus.** Initially you were **dead.** That was your condition apart from Jesus. Ephesians 2:1 says, “You were dead in your transgressions and sins.”

4 Stages of Growth

Dead → Baby

“You were **dead** in your transgressions and sins...” Ephesians 2:1

“Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be **born again.**’” John 3:7

At the moment that you cried out to Jesus to save you, you were born again - you were transformed into a new creation in Christ. Your old self died and a new spiritual being was born. You became a baby Christian. Babies feed on the milk of God’s word as Peter writes:

4 Stages of Growth

Dead → Baby → Youth

“Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it **you may grow up** into salvation.” 1 Peter 2:2

Now you might think that the fourth stage of Christian growth would be “maturity” or “adulthood.” Not so. The mature believer - the fully devoted follower of Christ - reproduces

him or herself. You have spiritual children. You multiply by investing yourself in others so they can turn around and raise up more disciple-makers as well.

4 Stages of Growth

Dead → Baby → Youth → Parent

“What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses **entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.**” 2 Timothy 2:2

This is the final key for us as a Disciple-making church - we need to actively and intentionally reproduce. **We need to multiply.** Think of it this way: **who was it that invested in you?** How did you grow into the follower of Christ you are today? Was it a Sunday School teacher? A youth leader or youth pastor? A mentor at Bible camp? A campus leader at your university? A pastor at your church? An older Christian friend or relative?

Who poured their life into you and helped you grow closer to the Lord? That is your spiritual parent - and if you're like me you have 10 or 15 - spiritual parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. All of the people who invested in you to help you become who you are.

That is your job now - **to pour out what has been poured into you so that others can grow.** That is a simple definition of disciple-making - pouring out what has been poured in. Giving back what's been given to you. What God has done IN you is what He wants to do THROUGH you.

Remember, **God has poured HIMSELF into you.** Your old self died and a new creation was born. The new you is ONE WITH GOD. He gave you His own life and the Spirit of the Living God lives in you. That is what we pour out: the very life of God that He has poured into us! We give back what He has given to us - by inviting people to come to Jesus, to hand over their old lives and receive from Him the only life that is truly life.

Let's pray.