

Living the Vision - Part 1 – Matthew 28:19

Scripture Reading: Mark 16:14-16

Introduction

This morning we are beginning a mini-series on living the biblical vision for a Christ-follower

And we are going to look at this vision in three parts: Outreach, Equipping, and Body Life

I want you to imagine those three parts of the vision being the legs on a three-legged stool

In order for the stool to be in balance and stable all of those legs need to be the same length, right?

It's easy to understand that if one of those legs was longer or shorter than the others, the stool would be out of whack

And the same is true with the three aspects of the biblical vision of the church

The members of the church need to be careful to put equal emphasis on each of them to keep the church in balance

As we begin our short study we are going to begin with **outreach** by looking at what we know as the "Great Commission" as it is found in Matthew 28:19-20

According to Webster's 1913 dictionary, a commission is a "duty or employment entrusted to any person or persons; a trust or a charge"

Webster's goes on to define a commission as "the acting under the authority of, or on account of, another"

And in Matthew 28:19-20 we see Jesus issue a charge to be fulfilled on the basis of his absolute authority that he declared in **Matthew 28:18** – that's the what the "therefore" is there for as it ties verses 18 and 19 together

We will be focusing on Matthew 28:19 today but the same commission is given in Mark 16:15, as we heard in our Scripture reading and it is alluded to in **Luke 24:47-48** when Jesus told the disciples he met on the road to Emmaus:

...repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.

And the commission is alluded to again in **Acts 1:8** when Jesus again told his disciples that they would be his witnesses:

"...in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" after they had received power of the Holy Spirit

And in both of those cases we understand that the role of a witness is to testify to what they have witnessed

Clearly, what we have recorded in Matthew 28 is a command and not a mere suggestion

Jesus is giving instructions to be carried out after he returns to the Father

And, in light of his resurrection from the dead, the all-encompassing nature of Jesus' authority is evident to those who have their eyes opened by faith

So, a commission can be roughly equated to a set of marching orders given by a commander and Jesus, as our High Commander, has given marching orders to his followers

If you are taking notes this morning, we will begin by considering **whom the commission is for** – that is, who is responsible for carrying it out

Then we will take some time to sort out **what the commission actually is**

And then we will finish up by looking at **two specific ways you can fulfill this part of the commission**

I. Whom the commission is for

We see in **Matthew 28:16** that *“the eleven disciples”* were present when Jesus gave the commission

Mark also relates that Jesus commissioned *“the eleven”* in **Mark 16:14**

So the commission is clearly for the disciples but is that as far as it goes? Was it only for the eleven?

Not at all!

When you look at Jesus’ final words in **Matthew 28:20** we see him promise:

“And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

The understanding of the church is that that promise refers to the church age - the time between the giving of the commission and the Lord’s return

So, when Jesus says *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations”* and *“Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation”* he is issuing that commission to all his followers from that day until the day he returns

That means this commission is still in force for Christ-followers today

And that it’s in force for *all* Christ-followers – not just for pastors or evangelists or missionaries and others who are appointed vocationally to the task – what we might call the “professional class”

And this is an individual as well as a corporate responsibility - it’s for everyone who calls Jesus Lord

In **John 14:15** Jesus says *“If you love me you will keep my commandments”*

And it should be the desire of every Christ-follower to obey the authoritative command of their Lord as an expression of their devotion to him

Since I believe that would be the sincere desire of each of us it would be beneficial to understand what the commission actually is

II. What the commission actually is

Let’s read **Matthew 28:19-20** together to see what Jesus said as he issued the commission

After declaring his absolute authority in heaven and on earth he said:

“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. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Verse 19 and the first part of verse 20 make up the actual commission and it appears pretty straightforward

Still, there is a great deal of confusion and misunderstanding that has been fostered over the years regarding what exactly Jesus is commanding his followers to do

And the confusion and misunderstanding is based on the first two words of our ESV version and what Jesus meant

It’s widely taught that the only command in the commission is “make disciples”

And you have likely heard that what looks like a command, “Go therefore,” is actually a participle in the original Greek that tells us how to carry out the command in the sentence which is “make disciples”

That “Go therefore” should actually be translated “as you are going” putting it in the same linguistic category as “baptizing” and “teaching”

And, sadly, the unstated implication is that our English translations of the Bible have gotten it wrong for centuries

But let’s take a moment to see if that’s accurate

While it's true that the Greek word is a participle that modifies the imperative verb "make disciples"

We run the risk of falling into error when we equate its meaning to "as you are going" *if* we make the going seem incidental or arbitrary and Jesus actually meant "Go and make disciples"

We need to remember what a radical departure from the norm this command was for Jesus' followers

Previously, Gentiles had been allowed to join Judaism as proselytes - there was a presumed measure of spirituality to be gained through separation and going to foreigners wasn't a part of Jewish thinking in that time

And Jesus had previously instructed his disciples to take the gospel to the Jews only

Now he tells them that Jewish believers were to take the message of the good news to the Gentiles making the "go" a significant part of the commission in light of the context of the culture

I also looked to see if I could find any other places where the same Greek word was used and I found 26 places where the word is used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament and the New Testament

One Old Testament example is found in **Genesis 43:2** where Jacob told his sons to go to Egypt and buy more grain

Another is in **Exodus 5:18** where Pharaoh told the Children of Israel to go and work making bricks

Then in **Matthew 2:8** we read where Herod told the Magi to "*Go and search diligently for the child*"

And in **Luke 7:22** we see Jesus command the disciples of John the Baptist to "*Go and tell John what you have seen and heard*"

And in **Luke 22:8** Jesus commanded his disciples to "*Go and prepare the Passover for us*"

I don't want to go through all of the examples because they all show the same thing – which is that the "go" is an essential part of the command and one cannot obey the command without going

The grain was in Egypt making going there an imperative, there was a place where the bricks were made that they had to go to, and one could not "search diligently" without going or "tell John" without going to John, etc.

Therefore, we can't divorce the going from making disciples and the command Jesus gave is "go and make disciples"

I think it should be abundantly clear that not every Christ-follower is called to be a missionary to a foreign land

However, we are commanded to be witnesses in our "Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria" as well as "the end of the earth"

That means we are charged with making disciples of the people around us in our towns, the greater surrounding area, and those who are quite different from us just as much as those who live in foreign lands

And to do that we have to go to the people surrounding us just the same as a foreign missionary has to go to a foreign land

But what is a disciple?

In some instances, a disciple can be equated to a "learner" and the word is often used in that way

However, the Greek word translated as "disciple" can also mean an adherent of a particular body of teaching

In our passage "disciple" is used to indicate a person committed to following Jesus, imitating his life, and passing on his teachings

And "disciple" is the most common way that born again individuals are labeled in the New Testament

In fact, the name "Christian" only appears 3 times and "believer" or "believers" is found only 12 times whereas the term "disciple" or "disciples" appears 269 times in the New Testament

A disciple is someone who is committed to a whole new way of life - it's a radical transformation that implies forsaking one's old life and committing to live as God requires

A person who is devoted to having their life so transformed that anyone looking at them would see Christ

And it's those kinds of people that Christ-followers are commanded to go and make

While the passage before us isn't a purely evangelistic passage - after all, Jesus didn't command his followers to go and make converts - it is an evangelistic passage because a person must accept Christ as their personal Lord and Savior if they are going to be his disciple

And in the parallel passage of **Mark 16:15** we see Jesus introduce this element of disciple-making as he commands his followers to: *"Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation."*

And we see a logical process spelled out in Romans 14 that shows proclaiming the gospel is for making converts:

Romans 10:13 says: *...everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved*

Then look one verse down in **Romans 10:14** where we read:

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?

And verse 15 [**Romans 10:15**] introduces the necessity of sending people to preach which we have seen is the mission of all Christ-followers – we've all been sent to those who need to be saved

When the apostle Paul stood before Agrippa to make his defense he quoted the words of the Lord as he commissioned Paul to go to the Gentiles specifically [**Acts 26:18**]

"To open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me."

And it is necessary to open the eyes of the unbelieving because, as we read in **2Corinthians 4:4** –

[Satan] has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

Every day, people are leaving this life and entering an eternity without God - we know that to be true

And we know the way to be reconciled to God so that one might live a God-pleasing life on this earth and then spend eternity with God when one's earthly life is over

People entering a Godless eternity is a complete deviation from the way God wants things to be

2Peter 3:9 tells us that God is patiently biding his time *"not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance"*

However, verse 10 [**2Peter 3:10**] goes on to say that God's patience is not unending and he has set a time when the opportunity for salvation will end

That day is coming and it's the job of every true follower of Jesus Christ to go and share their faith – to go and share the gospel in order to see as many as possible become disciples of Jesus Christ

Still, many Christ-followers blanch at the very idea of going to purposely share their faith with an unbeliever and the Great Commission has become the great omission for many, if not most, Christ-followers

Some simply want to wash their hands of their responsibility and pass off the responsibility to someone else but others are genuinely afraid to go and share

Many are afraid of rejection or ridicule or even of "messing it up" because they fear they don't know enough

However, we all need to recognize that we don't go alone or in our own strength - remember, Jesus promised to be with us we will be witnessing in the strength he give us - God never commands what he doesn't enable and empower

Let me repeat that so you are sure to hear it - **God never commands what he doesn't also enable and empower**

And sharing the gospel is easier than you ever imagined it could be

Let's look at two specific ways you can fulfill the "go" part of the Great Commission and even do it "as you are going"

III. Two ways you can fulfill the "as you are going" part of the commission

Take a moment to clear your mind of all that you think you know about evangelism - I'm not going to tell you to go and preach on a street corner or to bludgeon strangers with the Bible

These two activities can be carried out as you go about your daily life and, with the right mindset and a bit of practice, will become as natural as breathing

The first thing you must do in order to fulfill the Great Commission is, not surprisingly, the first word of the commission, "go"

If you are going to share the gospel you have to break out of the "holy huddle" of your Christ-following friends and put yourself in the company of unbelievers

But, if you are living anything resembling a normal life, you are already doing that on most days and the only thing you need to change is *how* you do it

You must change how you go about your comings and goings and act with intention and purpose - the intention to fulfill the Great Commission and go with the commission in mind

Put "make disciples" on your to-do list and make it one of your reasons for going out and about

A. Intentionally Interact

That is to say, you need to **intentionally interact** with those you are already encountering on a day-by-day basis

Before you venture out of your home whether it is to go to work or to the store or whatever errand you might be headed out on or even if you just are going out for a walk, stop and consider how to go in the spirit of the commission

Ask God to help you go with the intention of **building bridges for the gospel**

Go with the purpose of looking for ways to **befriend those who need the Lord**

I think you'd agree that you are more likely to listen to someone you consider a friend than you are to listen to a stranger or someone you think looks down on you - so be genuinely friendly to the people you encounter

Be pleasantly open in your demeanor and seek to get to know those you meet - smile and have a kind word - strive for an attractiveness of manner and a peaceful spirit and exhibit genuine interest in and care for others

Isn't that what Jesus did?

Consider the account of the **Samaritan woman** at the well in John 4

Even though it was completely counter-cultural for a Jewish man to speak to a woman not to mention a hated, half-breed Samaritan, Jesus took pains to befriend her

Or the account of **Zacchaeus** from Luke 19

Zacchaeus was a hated tax collector and known thief and Jesus called to him by name and even went so far as to go to dine at his home

And, in both of those cases, the people Jesus befriended gained salvation and were put on the path of discipleship

It should go without saying that people can spot a phony from miles away so make it your true intention to make friends so as to build bridges for the gospel

Will it work every time? Of course not! Not everyone is going to be open to your overtures every time you make them Jesus makes clear that he is sending us out as sheep among wolves so we know we will encounter resistance and even hostility but that doesn't absolve us from seeking to befriend everyone we meet for the sake of the gospel - we are commissioned to do so

And you never know when you might be planting a seed or watering a seed planted by someone else that may one day lead to a harvest

So, let me quickly give you three things you must do in order to intentionally interact in a Great Commission way:

1. You must leave your comfort zone

If you're like me, this isn't going to come naturally so you will have to rely on the supernatural power and presence of Christ you have been promised but you have to get out there and do it

2. You must accept people as they come

Coming across initially as judgmental will be the death knell of your efforts

Contrary to what our culture is trying to promulgate today, it is possible to accept people without approving of their sin You can engage in friendly conversation with someone and show empathetic concern for them without endorsing or embracing their unbiblical behavior

3. You must be open to further interaction

When you show genuine care and concern people will tend to open up to you and you will likely find yourself with opportunities for further interaction and spending time together

Once more we have the example of how Jesus was unafraid to go to the homes of known sinners to break bread with them and to spend time with them with the intention of sharing the gospel when the opportunity presented itself

Still, many Christ-followers are reluctant to purposely go to non-believers because they fear ridicule and rejection when they get around to presenting the gospel

So let's look at the second way to fulfill the commission and it's really quite simple - **simply share your story**

B. Share Your Story

As you interact with those who have not yet accepted Christ, you will find commonalities with them

As they share the situations of their lives, the difficulties they are facing, the concerns they have, and so forth, you will find that they often parallel with your life

It's a reality that people are very open to personal testimony

The website Yelp has made a very successful business of providing a place for customers to leave their testimony of experience with businesses - and people rely heavily on those reviews when considering going to those businesses

A personal testimony about the difference your relationship with Christ has made in your life will grab the attention of those you are seeking to reach and will likely have a greater effect on them than a mere recitation of abstract truth

The apostle Paul did just that when addressed the crowd as he was being arrested in Acts 22 and again when he gave his defense before Agrippa in Acts 26 as he used his personal experience as proof of the significance of Christ

Personal testimonies are a very powerful witness

Here are four elements of your testimony you should be prepared to share:

1. Your life before you came to Christ

Often, what your friend shares will open up the conversation to something similar in your life that you can share. Briefly sharing that you understand where they are coming from on a personal level provides grounds for further sharing. Be discreet but share common ground.

2. How you came to know Christ

Again, this lets your friend know what you have been through and how they also might also come to Christ. Prepare in advance what you might say when the opportunity presents itself and then trust Jesus' promise to help you when the time comes.

3. Your life since salvation

This one should come naturally and it lets the other person see the difference knowing Christ can make but you must be aware of what difference your relationship with Jesus has made so consider it in advance.

4. Give an invitation

This can be as simple as asking if the other person would like to hear more or giving a formal presentation of the gospel. And, yes, you can even invite them to a church event or church service to introduce them to more Christ-followers.

Now it's likely that not all of these will be shared in every encounter

It's very likely you will often find yourself in situations where you will only have opportunity to listen and share how you had similar struggles and how Christ made a difference in your life for example.

People are typically carrying a lot of baggage and when you befriend them they may well ask you the reason for the hope that you have.

So the point is to be ready to share the reasons for that hope because there are many different situations where you will be able to do so leading to an opportunity to make a convert and put them on the path to discipleship.

That's it, two very simple steps: go with the intention to interact with non-believers and share your story.

Conclusion

The bottom line is this:

You don't have to be a theologian to fulfill the commission you just have to be obedient to the commission to go and then be intentional in your relationships and share your story.

Having that intentionality and taking advantage of the opportunities to share Christ fulfills first, individual step of the command to "go therefore" part of the commission and may well result in making converts.

A convert is not the desired end of the matter but it is the first necessary step in disciple-making and it depends on you. "Go therefore and make disciples" is not a suggestion and it's not an activity to be engaged in casually.

It's a command from our High Commander and a commissioning to intentional activity and it is for each and every follower of Jesus Christ individually and corporately.

Next week, we will take a look at the "*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*" part of the commission as we consider the second element of the biblical vision of the church: **Equipping**.

Let's pray

Mark 16:14-16 (page 854)

Afterward he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at table, and he rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen. And he said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.