

Matthew 28:16–20, The Gospel at Work: In Making Disciples

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[0 : 00] Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.

! And when they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. As you're being seated, let me add the warmest of welcomes to the many who have probably already greeted you at the door or around your seats. Thank you for being here this morning. As we get started, let me just pause and pray for us. Father, your name is great. You are greatly praised. And each week at this moment in our service, we acknowledge that because you are great, you are to be heard and listened to and submitted to.

And so in these next moments, we ask for your help that by your spirit, through your word, that we would find ourselves meeting the living God. We ask these things for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Well, this week, this morning, I'm batting cleanup. We wrap up a four-week series that we have called The Gospel at Work. The Gospel at Work, it highlights four aspirations, four ambitions, four desires that the pastoral team has for you.

[2 : 08] When a congregation embraces the gospel, the good news of Jesus, what priorities will it give itself to?

What happens when the gospel possesses a people? By way of summary, these last three weeks, we've seen three things. We've seen the primacy of proclamation. We desire to be a proclaiming people, telling the good news of Jesus to others indiscriminately. It is this declarative act that finds its way from our mouths to others. We cannot help but tenderly and boldly share Christ to others. We saw that we are a congregation that seeks to send people. We recognize that there will be some among us who will be scattered abroad in this world, some among us spread throughout this country for gospel purposes. We desire that those among us will be sent from this place to strengthen the local church elsewhere. That's why we have pastoral residents. That's why we have summer interns. We understand that there's a benefit short term, but our desire is to send them forth so that the church universal will be strengthened. Thirdly, last week we saw we are a people who display love for one another.

The proof of life is love, a love that is tangible, visible, demonstrable. We would selflessly and sacrificially give ourselves to one another in time, in resources, in energy, in Christlike affection. We desire to proclaim, we desire to send, we desire to love. And this last week, is the final verb that captures the heart of the pastoral team here at Christ Church Chicago.

[4 : 18] Well, before I disclose it, let me say it's this. It is to be every Christian's life work.

It is the purpose for which you and I remain here. You may consider your life work as excelling in business. You may consider your life's work fulfilling the faithful duties of a husband or a father, or myself, husband, father, parent, or a spouse.

You may consider your life's work contributing to your field of study. The truth is that not all of us are given to business. Not all of us are given to parenthood or marriage or even academia.

But this morning, I want to tell us that the life work of every Christian, regardless of what life affords or what opportunities life has allotted, is this.

We make disciples. We make. Now, I know it needs. We make disciples. We disciple.

[5 : 31] This morning, it's my desire to make it clear that we are about making disciples. So I've tagged our time together. Disciple duplication.

I like that one. Disciple duplication. When I was taking high school journalism, I was taught the basics of crafting an effective article. You must answer the six fundamental questions my Mr. Kress would always tell me.

You need to answer for the readers the who, the what, the why, the where, the when, and the how. Now, certainly, there are other features that go into journalism.

But these six must be answered. And it's with these six questions that I'd like to approach the text this morning. You can imagine the headline. Breaking news.

The Jerusalem Times. The Galilean Gazette. The Palestinian Post. And there's the headline. Jesus departs and gives his last words.

[6 : 43] Jesus departs and gives his last words. And I want us to read the text this morning from a journalist's vantage point. I know Matthew wasn't a journalist. But he conveys the necessity of making disciples through a concise and compelling five verses.

So here we go. The who. Who is involved in all this? Verses 16 and 17. Now, the agony of the cross is behind Jesus. He had emerged from the grave victorious.

Death had been destroyed. And now he had returned to those who were near to him. The eleven had assembled and appeared to be joined by others.

They worshipped. The eleven worshipped. They worshipped because he was worthy of worship. He was divine to them for little could explain the transformation that had taken place in the lives of the eleven.

Given witnessing Jesus' life, death, and now resurrection. They had to worship because he was worthy of worship. Now, there are skeptics out there that will argue that Jesus never asserted his divinity at any time.

[7 : 54] But in this moment, at least for Matthew, Jesus was receiving worship that was only allocated to God himself. Matthew wants to establish with clarity that Jesus is more than just a mere man.

Interestingly, the Bible tells us that, verse 17, that while the disciples, I interpret, the disciples worshipped, there were some who doubted.

It's a baffling verse. Some were skeptical. Another translation says that some hesitated. They weren't quite sure what to make of all of this.

Some within the crowd had reservations. Commentators are divided on how to explain this or even try to explain this away. But I'm just going to, it's best just to leave it there.

The eleven, along with others, had gathered and there was a mixed response to the risen Lord. Perhaps even indicative of how Jesus is received today. The text really speaks to all of us in this room.

[9 : 00] Though we may be of a mixed sort. As some of us, like the eleven, can worship wholeheartedly, unreservedly, passionately, intentionally.

And others in this room sit with hesitation. Unsure doubt and reservations. But here's the who. The who is you.

The who is me. It is us. We are to envision ourselves among them. Now what is the what? What is being required?

Or what is being asked of them? Well, verses 19 and 20. What is required? Well, verses 19 and 20 are often referred to as the Great Commission. It's the final declarative charge that Jesus gives to his followers.

Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I've commanded you.

[10 : 02] And behold, I am with you always to the end of the age. In these verses, we're told our life's work. What are you to be about? Perhaps you're brought here because of study.

Perhaps you're brought here because of a job. Perhaps you're brought here because you married someone who happens to live here. Well, regardless of what brought you here, this is what we are to be about.

It's quite astounding if we take some time to reflect on this charge. Jesus is saying that I have all authority in heaven and on earth, and therefore you are to go and make disciples.

Because all authority is mine, you are being sent out to reclaim the world for myself. It's astounding. The desire of God is to win the world back to himself.

So what is quite clear? Make disciples. And it's worth pausing here to define the term disciple. If we are to make disciples, what is a disciple? Well, a disciple at a foundational level is kind of a pupil-student-to-teacher relationship.

[11:13] In the Jewish world, the rabbis had disciples. They were surrounded by their pupils. In the Greco-Roman world, the philosophers had their pupils, their students that followed them around.

The idea is well established in the Bible. In Judaism, they are disciples of Moses. You even read of it in the New Testament.

In the Gospels, there were John the Baptist, a teacher, had his own disciples. In short, disciples are individuals that give themselves the teaching and the instructions of a recognized teacher.

But for Jesus' disciples, there was something greater. There was something deeper. You see, it's not only his instructions that we are to know, but his instructions are to be kept.

To follow Jesus was not merely changing what one thinks about a particular issue. It's changing not only how one thinks, but how one lives. Christianity is not just a system of beliefs.

[12:16] It's a system of behaviors as well. They were not only to know the body of material from Jesus, they were to copy and imitate his very life.

And it's hinted at in verse 20. We'll get there shortly. We are to teach others to observe, to live out, to do what they are being taught.

The Christian faith, I will say, is an action. Last week, we asserted that it is radical Christ-like love demonstrated towards one another.

For those Jesus called in the Scriptures, it required this radical love. In the lives of the apostles, you see this. It required far more than just believing a set of beliefs.

For some, they had to forsake loved ones. For others, they left family and friends. For others, they left their vocation or their job.

[13:18] Christian discipleship had demands, and the costs often exceeded more than just the classroom setting. And this is what Jesus is charging the first disciples to do.

Peter, when I called you, I'm asking you to go tell others about me. Invite them to believe in me and to follow me and to teach them to obey me.

John, go tell others about me. Invite them to believe in me and follow me. Teach them to obey me.

James, go tell others about me.

Invite them to believe in me and follow me. Teach them to obey me. What I have done with you, do to others. Duplicate yourself.

And this, Jesus is saying, is the plan to win the world to myself. To practice disciple duplication.

[14:23] Bing, go tell others about me. Invite them to believe in and follow me. Teach them to obey me.

Joe, go tell others about me. To believe in me. To believe in me. To believe in me. To believe in me. And follow me and teach them to obey me. And Dave, the same. Our pastoral ambition is to do this. To rinse and repeat. It is this task. The what we are to be about.

We are in the business of disciple making. This is the call for the Christian. All Christians, this is Christ's desire for us. This is his command to us. We are to make disciples.

The who? Really all who follow Jesus. The what? To duplicate ourselves. And here's the why. Why do we do this?

[15:22] Verse 18. We need to re-read, return to verse 18 to discern the why. While they're on the mountain, Jesus would come and assert who he is. He is the one to whom all authority in heaven and on earth are given.

All the might and all the majesty found in both heaven and earth belong to him. We are not permitted to think he's less than divine.

We are not to think that he is unhuman. He is, he, his domain is both heaven and earth. He rules both heaven and earth. He is the linchpin that really bridges the two.

In the words of the Apostle Paul, that it's in him, in him all things hold together. Being students of the Bible, you may recall a scene early on in the book of Matthew.

When Jesus comes on the scene. He's about to start his ministry. And an interesting thing happens. The devil approaches him and kind of tempts him while Jesus is in the wilderness for 40 days and 40 nights.

[16:26] And at the start of his ministry, Jesus is given an offer by the devil. The devil says, hey, I want to take you to the highest place. I'm going to show you all these things, the kingdoms of the world.

And he says, hey, if you fall down and worship me, I'm going to give them all to you. It would be his if Jesus would only bow and worship.

Jesus refuses and he dismisses the devil, Satan. At the start of Jesus' ministry, he was offered the kingdoms of the world and he rejected the offer. At the end of his ministry, Matthew wants us to know it all belongs to him.

It's all his. The son of man, one commentator would write, was handed over to the powers and given over to death.

But now he has power over all of them. There is none superior to him. There is no one supreme, no rival, no equal. He is the omnipotent one, the all powerful one, the all authoritative one.

[17:32] So why? Why do we heed this commission? Well, it's who he is. He's told us who he is.

A stranger may come to you and ask you to do something, request something of you. And because they're a stranger, you might dismiss them. You might pass them up.

They're just a stranger. Well, what if a loved one came to you and asked, made a request from you? You, out of love for them, may be inclined to meet their need or help them out or do whatever they asked you to do.

Well, what if an employer comes to you and asks you to complete a task at which you may under obligation do because it may cost you your job.

If you're in the military and your commanding officer comes to you and gives an order, you must obey or you are caught defying the very government which you're sworn to serve.

[18:37] It makes all the difference. In our lives, who makes the request? Stranger, loved one, employer, commanding officer.

What are you to do when heaven's son makes the request of you? Why? Why? Why are we to give ourselves to this commission?

Because it's rooted in who we actually believe he is. We think lowly of him. The commission. We think lowly of the commission.

We think highly of him. We will think highly of the commission. And as Christians, we must give ourselves to this because Christ is worthy of our very lives.

The one asking is the one, the very one in whom we have come to love, whom we're indebted to, who saved our very lives. He is the enthroned one and we have been summoned into his service.

[19:48] Who? You. What? Make disciples. Why? Because all authority is his. Now where?

Where are we to do this? Very quickly. The scope is vast. Where? The destination of discipleship is right there in verse 19. All nations.

How far are we to go to the ends of the earth? Where are the boundaries of our task? There are none. It would not be confined to Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria.

It would go to every corner of the earth. It would be a global work as we will attest to in the book of Acts. Right? I think it will have no boundaries.

It would be destined to go to the ends of the earth. There would be no corner of the earth which the disciples should not go to great lengths to travel. There would be no geographical limit or boundary to this charge.

[20:51] Wherever people are found, there you are to go. Because of God's universal authority, they have a universal mission.

Now when? When do we do this? Well, the commission we find is not only for the original 11, but it carries ongoing applicability. If it were a call only to the original 11, then verse 20 wouldn't make sense.

Why would Jesus need to accompany them to the very end of the age? He would simply have promised, well, I'll be there until the very end of your lives. No, rather he declared that his presence would remain through the end of the age.

The promise applies to all disciples for all time. You and I. Who, what, why, where, when.

And in our closing, I want to spend the most time on the how. How is this done?

[21:52] Now, if you look at the verses right there in verse 19, the governing verb in these verses is actually the verb make. Make.

It's the only overt imperative or the only commanding verb in the original language. But it's accompanied by three other verbs. Go, baptize, and teach.

Go, baptize, and teach. These convey how disciple duplication is to happen. These three accompanying verbs present to us how we are to make disciples.

We are to go. We are to go. If we are to make disciples of all nations, then this is a charge to go everywhere. It is assumed that you may have to go out of your way to make disciples.

Hence the urge to go. It carries this notion of proactive action. Right? It does not say, the Bible doesn't say, wait. Wait, wait, wait.

[22 : 56] Sit and make disciples. Wait when life is all settled, full, comfortable, and convenient. And then go make disciples.

He does not urge us to sit and make disciples. No, we are to envision this proactivity. It will require initiative on our part. Making disciples and not this reactive endeavor.

It is a proactive venture. Disciples are made. In other words, it requires work. It requires you and I, this hands-on approach and involvement.

It will require pursuit on our part. It will require work. We are to go. Disciple duplication will also require the practice of baptism.

Now, what is it? Well, at a minimum, baptism is an initiation rite in the early church. And it signifies that a particular individual or family has entered into the covenant community.

[24 : 04] They have really transferred allegiances, so to say. They come and they enter the family of faith or the community of faith under the Christian God. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

So, you can imagine this with me, right? So, if you are an early Jewish convert, who do you worship? Only God alone. But here in Christian baptism, they enter into a new worship of a triune God.

God the Father, God the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Or you can also imagine with me, perhaps you are an early Greek believer and you have this pantheon or this polytheism that you practice.

You worship a lot of gods at one time. But here in Christian baptism, we find that they're saying there's no other God but the God of the Bible.

God the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. So, baptism becomes this identification of who people worship. They were submitting to Him, Christ, really, as the one with all authority.

[25 : 14] They are to go. They are to baptize. The last one is they are to teach. They are to teach.

Making disciples requires us to pass on the teachings of Jesus. It is the body of material contained in our Bibles. We are those given to these words, the words of life.

It's this ongoing task we are to give ourselves to. We are to teach them to observe. Teach them to observe all that's written in this book.

I remember this conversation quite vividly. My family arrived in Hyde Park 10 years ago to step into this role in which I now serve. I remember talking to a Christian campus minister here at the university who had been here for nearly a decade.

I was playing coy. I didn't tell him why I came into the neighborhood. But I asked him, well, what type of churches are around here?

[26 : 23] Tell me about the churches. And he said, well, I can tell you all about them, Bing. I can tell you depending on the type of student, they'll go to a certain type of church.

He had worked with students for a long time. And so he shared it in this way. He said, Bing, for those who like expressive worship and music, they go here. I'm not going to say the church, but for those who like the expressive music, they go here.

For those who want to get heavily involved in the community and be socially engaged, they go here. For those who are engaged in activism or desire to be engaged in activism, political activism, they go here.

And then he shared, and there's this church. At the time we were called Holy Trinity Church. Now we're at Christ Church Chicago. But he would share, and there's this church in the neighborhood. People go there. I'll never forget it. People go there if they want to learn the Bible.

[27 : 26] In my heart, I'm like, yeah, right? The music is great. Activism is necessary. Social engagement is relevant and important.

But the reputation 10 years ago of this congregation was, hey, if you want to know the teachings of Jesus, if you want to know the core beliefs of the Christian faith, if you want to know doctrine, you go there.

It's for those who want to know their Bibles. What a reputation. It is this task that our pastoral team gives itself to. We aspire to be a congregation that teaches the Bible, the words and the instructions of Jesus, so that you and I may observe them.

Seldom will you be at a program or an event at Christ Church Chicago where the Bible is not open. It's open at our staff meetings. It's open at our elder meetings.

It's open at our deacon meetings. It is open at our children's ministry, in our youth ministry, in our adult education hour. The Bible is always open. Why?

[28 : 36] Because of all the things we want to be about, we want to equip and train up people to handle, to read this book rightly. Because in so doing, you and I could observe the very words that Jesus gave to us.

We are in the business of disciple duplication. We give ourselves to train and equip the members of Christ Church Chicago with the word of God, knowing that it is the most valuable thing this world affords.

When the British, when at the British, in any of Britain's coronation services, these words are read. Here is wisdom, the royal law, the living oracles of God.

Allow me to close with this personal story. I think my mind is stirred and my heart stirred, just knowing the university students that find their way here, wherever, whichever college or university you're from.

When I arrived 10 years ago, I was tasked to build out a university ministry. I'll close with this. I built out a ministry on what I thought would be effective, engaging lecturers on various contemporary issues.

[29 : 59] We could find people. There are seminaries nearby. There are professors nearby. There are gifted Christian scholars who are accessible that would come and lecture in our university ministry.

And after two years, Pastor Helm, who's not here this morning, he's in Ho Chi Minh, I think. I think he sensed I was struggling. Actually, he knew I was struggling.

So he said, Bing, let's take a trip. Let's take a trip. And so off to England we went. Off to England we went. And in the course of four days, we went to four churches in three different cities.

We went to Cambridge, Oxford, and London. And we were visiting these churches and just trying to figure out what makes a university ministry out of a local church effective.

And so we went to Cambridge and Oxford because of the academics. We went to London because it was urban.

[30 : 59] And I remember as I was sitting down with all of these leaders and just trying to, Dave and I were sitting down with all these leaders trying to take all these ideas in and to really figure out what we would do here.

And I began to share, I can't even remember, Dave's not here, but I can't even remember who said it. And I was really proud of what we were doing. We got so and so to come.

We got so and so to come. We were going to out lecture the university. And you guys laugh because it is funny. But one of the pastors, he just looks me straight in the eye.

And he says, bang, just do the Bible. That's not going to work. That can't work.

We have to be on the forefront of these conversations. We have to be at the edge so we can engage.

[32 : 06] And that line just resounded in my head. Just do the Bible. In my mind, I was saying, it's not that easy.

You don't know this context. We need more than the Bible. We returned from that trip. And in the fall of 18, I launched our revamped university ministry.

For the undergrads, I call it dinner and Bible. Because what am I going to give you? I'm going to give you dinner and the Bible. For the grad students, I'm going to give you coffee and the Bible. But I'm going to give you the Bible. I'm going to give you the Bible. Because these lectures are great.

But without this, we cannot, as a pastoral team, duplicate disciples. We must be taught.

[33 : 12] We must be equipped. We must train ourselves up in these things. You can be assured that you'll get the Bible, the body of teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Certainly other things as well. But why the teachings of Jesus? So that you may observe them. And in so doing, we, Joe, Dave, and I are discharging our duties as pastors.

Discipling you in the word. In the hopes that you will pass it on to others. And carry on this mission. It is no easy mission. Do you know why I know it's no easy mission?

It is a difficult mission to accomplish and fulfill. It is so difficult. It is the, it is the, can you imagine this? But Jesus says to the disciples, I want you, I want you to win the whole world.

It is the greatest task. But here's the comfort in verse 20. The greatest task in all the world is accompanied by the greatest person and the greatest power.

[34 : 18] With the greatest power in all the world. How do I know it's hard? Because if Jesus said, hey, just go do it on your own. I'm going to go up here and I'll hold out. And when I come back, you'll be fine. He says, no, I need you to go do this.

And it's going to be hard. How hard? I'm going to come with you. And I'm going to bring all my resources and all my power and all my authority to enable you to do that.

So we, the people of God, are given the spirit of God to carry out the mission of God to win the world to himself through making disciples.

So on that mountain top, on that day in the early first century, Jesus departs and gives his last words. And he establishes this necessity.

You and I must make disciples. The model for Christianity is disciples that make disciples.

[35 : 16] What I've called disciple duplication. And this is the ambition. This is the aspiration of Christ Church Chicago.

And so I look at you, a lot of universities that students that come in and you might be like, well, when I will I find friends here? Possibly. Will I be fed here? Certainly.

But what am I going to get out of this? I can tell you this. Week in, week out, there will be people in this pulpit that will feed you this over and over and over and over and over and over.

Why? Because we're trying to duplicate disciples. We're trying to go. We're trying to baptize. We're trying to teach. We're trying to teach.

So that Christ is honored. Well, we conclude this timely series as we've gotten underway in the fall. We will be a church that proclaims.

[36 : 19] We will be a church that sins. We will be a church that loves. And we will be a church that disciples, makes disciples. And may we continue to do so in an ever increasing manner as the Spirit of God enables us to do so.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for your word and the fullness of it and the reminder that here, your word to your people, as you got ready to leave, was to go make disciples, bringing them into the fold, and teaching them to observe all the things that you've been doing.

And so may we as a congregation do so in an ever increasing way with the help of your Spirit. May our convictions grow deeper.

May our strength grow stronger as you lead us. May we rise up as a congregation to be able to train and equip and to speak into one another's lives.

May we rise up as a congregation to disciple one another, really. Strengthen us for this task, we pray. We ask these things for Jesus' sake.

[37 : 47] Amen.