

Matthew 28:18-20—Commissioned by Jesus  
College Baptist Church  
January 31, 2021

I invite you to turn with me this morning to Matthew 28:18-20. You can find the text on p. 835 in the pew Bible. Or the text is printed in the bulletin with space for notes for your convenience.

As you turn there, I'd like to express some words of sincere gratitude. As most of you know, I was away from January 18 through January 27 at a pastoral study retreat in Georgia called the Savannah Sabbatical. Thank you to the elders for allowing me to be away for this time of fellowship and learning. And thank you to the congregation for your generous giving to the general fund, which provided the financial support for this trip. Studying under Dr. Scott Hafemann, who is a world-class scholar with a love for the church, alongside 10 other pastors from around the country and world is a rare and precious gift. So, thank you and thank God!

Special thanks to Scott Allen, who filled the pulpit with faithful, clear preaching last Sunday. And thanks to my amazing wife, who held down the fort while I was away—with the help of my generous mother-in-law and mother. And thanks to my kids for being kind and obedient. I have returned refreshed and rejuvenated for continued ministry alongside you at College Baptist.

Have you ever heard this adage? “If you aim at nothing, you’ll hit it every time.” There’s a lot of truth to that statement, right? “If you aim at nothing, you’ll hit it every time.” That little aphorism reminds us of the importance of setting goals—identifying targets in family, work, hobbies, finances, and so forth. We need to aim at something, if we hope to achieve something.

Well, that little maxim is true in the Christian life too. “If you aim at nothing [in the Christian life], you’ll hit it every time.” Now, thankfully the goal in the Christian life is crystal clear in Scripture. According to Ephesians 1:12—Christians are to “live for the praise of [God’s] glory.” Our aim, our target is to bring glory to God—that is to say, to make God famous—especially for graciously saving us from our sin and welcoming us into his eternal kingdom. The Westminster Shorter Catechism famously summarizes this goal with the following Q&A.

Question: What is the chief end of man?

Answer: Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.

But let’s be honest, even with the crystal-clear goal of God’s glory, we are led to automatically ask the question, “how?” Practically-speaking, how do I “live for the praise of God’s glory?” Well, the words of Jesus to his disciples in Matthew 28:18-20 answer that question. This text, known as the Great Commission explains one of the most fundamental ways that Christians ought to glorify God. So, tune in to these familiar and foundational words of Jesus this morning.

*<sup>18</sup> And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> 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, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

## Make Disciples

As I said, this passage is typically referred to as the Great Commission of Jesus—because of his crystal-clear command to his disciples before his ascension to heaven. Just as the military commissions officers for service, Jesus commissions his followers for service. And the commission, or command, begins explicitly in verse 19. Listen again...listening especially for the verbs—the action words—in this sentence.

*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, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.*

Look closely with me at the first four verbal forms in Jesus' commission to his followers: Go; Make Disciples; Baptizing; Teaching. Now, only one of those verbs is the Main Verb—the actual command of Jesus to his follower. Do you know which verb is the main verb? Is it “go?” Is it “make disciples?” Is it “baptizing?” Or is it “teaching?”

Well, it's not “teaching.” It's not “baptizing.” And, contrary to popular opinion, it's not “go”—even though it is the first word in the sentence. Grammatically-speaking, “make disciples” is the main verb—the main command—the great commission of Jesus.

Now if we are going to understand the command “make disciples” we have to know what a disciple is, right? We need a definition of “disciple.” The word “disciple” isn't an explicitly religious or biblical or Christian word. It was a word used in the everyday 1<sup>st</sup> century world in which Jesus lived. Some have defined it as “follower”—in the sense of a student “following” his teacher. In the ancient world, a student might literally leave his home to literally follow a famous rabbi on his teaching circuit from village to village. That was certainly what the 12 apostles and crowds had done in response to Jesus' teaching. So, I like that definition of disciple as “follower.”

However, I've found a better definition that I would like to share with you this morning. It think it is an even more accurate and compelling definition of what it means to be and make disciples. According to Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, in their excellent book, *The Vine Project*, “*a disciple is someone engaged in transformative learning.*” I like this definition because it shifts the emphasis from following passively like a fan, to learning actively like a student. And it also is a reminder that as learners we are not interested in mere information, but information that leads to transformation. So, a disciple of Jesus is someone who is not interested in the mere content of our Master-Teacher Jesus, but for that content to change us into his likeness.

Like students who are transformed into their teacher, players who are conformed to their coaches, or apprentices who imitate their master craftsman, a disciple of Jesus is someone committed to learn under his lordship. And this brings glory to God the Father—as people are transformed by the power of the Spirit into the image of Jesus the Son. So, it's no wonder that Jesus calls his disciples to “make [more] disciples”—to invite others to be a learner of Jesus—“*a forgiven sinner who is learning Christ in repentance and faith.*” This brings glory to God!

But yet again, we find ourselves asking the question, “how?” How do I, how do we, make disciples? Well, that's where the other verbal modifiers fit it. Go, baptizing, and teaching are participles modifying the main verb. They tell us “how” to make disciples.

## **Go—Movement**

As I said earlier, the word “go” is often thought to be the main verb of the sentence. But it actually modifies the main verb, “make disciples.” So, if you wanted to change the word order of verse 19, you could say, “Therefore, go make disciples.” Or “Therefore, as you go, make disciples.” This word go implies motion. Making disciples necessarily includes movement. You can’t really make disciples unless you “go.” But where and to whom should we “go.”

Well, when you read the remainder of the phrase, you see that we are called to go make disciples of “all nations.” Or a slightly better translation might be “all ethnicities” or what missiologists call “people groups.” According to an organization called the Joshua Project, there are 17,440 people groups in the world. Did you know that 7,414 are unreached with the Gospel of Jesus? Over 7,000 nations/ethnicities/people groups without disciples/worshippers of Jesus! Disciple-making requires God’s people to move across the globe. That’s why we support ministries like ELIC—not only to cheer them on from the sidelines, but to actively send our own people across the globe to participate in the global movement of disciple-making. Is God calling you to go? This summer and maybe for a lifetime?

But making disciples isn’t only about a movement across the globe. It is also a movement across the street or across the campus. Let’s be honest—each of us know individuals who have not yet come to saving faith in Jesus—they have not yet committed to be a learner of Jesus. Some are radically opposed to Jesus. Others are committed to a life of ritualistic religion. Some are just apathetic. But all of them need Jesus. According to a 2010 study by the “Association of Religious Data Archives,” of the nearly 47,000 residents in Hillsdale County, almost 36,000 claimed no religious affiliation. That tells me that there is a lot of disciple-making to do right here in our county. Will you take some initiative to move across the street or across the campus?

And let’s not forget that making disciples begins with a movement across the house or the dorm. If you are a Christian here today, there is a high probability that you were first exposed to the Gospel of Jesus by a family member or close friend. But that didn’t happen automatically. It took initiative and movement. Dads, will you move across the living room to read the Bible to your kids. Moms, will you move across the bedroom to not only tuck your kiddos in, but pray with them? Students, will you move toward your hurting roommate or rebellious housemate with the Gospel? Making disciples should begin with a movement at home—like it did for Timothy, whose mother and grandmother made him acquainted with the sacred writings during his childhood.

So, wherever you “go”—“go make disciples.”

## **Baptizing—Multiplication**

And according to Jesus, whenever new disciples are made, they should be baptized. In the New Testament, we see over and over again that baptism is the sign of initiation into the Christian life. Acts 2:41 says that “*those who received [the] word [that is, the Gospel message] were baptized.*” In other words, baptism is for the believer, the already-converted. That is why here at College Baptist, we only baptize believers—those who have already “received the word.” So, strictly speaking, you don’t baptize in order to make a disciple. You baptize to recognize that a disciple has already been made. Baptism is a public celebration of discipleship multiplication.

As we will see later this morning, the water of baptism provides a beautiful picture of (1) cleansing of sin, (2) life, and (3) identification with the death and resurrection of Jesus. Being baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit reminds us that the Triune God has saved this individual into his family—the church, his gathered people. And it is a reminder that we, God’s family, have a responsibility to nurture these individuals as they grow along with us as learners of Jesus.

Last year, we were privileged to baptize 9 disciples of Jesus at College Baptist. Today we will baptize 3 more. Wouldn’t it be fantastic to see the Lord continue to multiply disciples as a result of our ministry? Hearing testimonies of conversion and witnessing baptisms is not only an encouragement to us, but it brings much glory to God.

### **Teaching—Maturation**

So, making disciples involves movement and multiplication. And it also involves maturation—*“teaching them to observe all that [Jesus] commanded.”* You see, authentic disciples grow; they mature. And the way they mature is through teaching. But again, not teaching merely for the sake of content, but for the sake of transformation—*“teaching them to observe all that Jesus commanded.”*

What does it mean to teach to observe? Well, it’s not passive observation. Like making observations of the stars in the sky. But active observation—like observing a national holiday by hosting a picnic or parade. Or even better, like observing traffic signs, by keeping the rules of the road. Jesus calls us to teach others to observe or keep all his commands.

In other words, we are called to teach fellow disciples to obey Jesus. Friends, obedience is not a dirty word. Obedience is the fruit of faith. Learning and observing all the commands of Jesus is a life-long commitment of any true disciple of Jesus. Teaching disciples to observe all the commands of Jesus is what we might call maturation.

This is why we place such an emphasis on biblical teaching at College Baptist—sermons, Sunday School, Growth Groups, Bible studies are not mere academic endeavors. They are opportunities to hear God’s Word, receive it by faith, and live it out in obedience. After all, Jesus said in John 15, *“You are my friends, if you do what I command.”* So observing or keeping the commands of Jesus is a sign of not only discipleship, but friendship with Jesus!

From verse 19 and the first half of verse 20, we have learned that Jesus commissions his people to make disciples and that **disciple-making is a movement of multiplication and maturation.** Now, this is a clear commission and it is an invigorating invitation into the work that God is doing in this world. But it is also a daunting task, which is why we must not forget the words which envelope Jesus’ commission. Listen again to verse 18...and the end of verse 20.

### **Abiding Authority of Jesus**

*All **authority** in heaven and on earth has been given to me.  
And behold, I am **with you always**, to the end of the age.*

You see, it is only BECAUSE Jesus has been given authority and BECAUSE he promises to abide always with his people that can we expect to carry out this command. We can't and don't make disciples in our own strength. Jesus has authority over everybody, everywhere—whether they recognize it or not. So, it is our duty and privilege to encourage all people to come under his authority as a disciple. And though this is a difficult task, we are not left to do it alone. Jesus has promised his abiding presence—which is a reference to the Holy Spirit. Though Jesus is not physically with us, the Spirit is abiding with us always to the end of this age, which will come to its completion when Jesus returns.

So, to complete or fill out our definition of disciple-making: **disciple-making is a movement of multiplication and maturation accomplished by the abiding authority of Jesus**. Do you see now, how disciple-making brings God glory?

- It is a movement across the globe, the street, the campus, the house, and the dorm.
- It is a movement of multiplication—as new believers are baptized as a public declaration of their allegiance to Jesus as their supreme authority.
- And it is a movement of maturation—as disciples are taught to observe all of Jesus' commands in faith-fueled obedience.

College Baptist, if we aim at nothing, we will hit it every time. So, we must keep this great commission of Jesus in our sights at all time. Like a sharp-shooter, we need to keep the target in view. We need to keep this God-glorifying goal in mind—that we might do our part in making disciples of all nations.