

MBC - 12/16/2018 - Pastor Doug Thompson
"Go!"
Matthew 28:16-20

Turn in your Bibles with me this morning - to the finish of Matthew's Gospel, ch.28, v.16. And this morning, Jesus gives us our marching orders. His work is finished, and He passes the baton to His church. This is our Great Commission—

- Matthew 28:16-20 ¹⁶Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. ¹⁸And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

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Jesus was murdered by wicked men. Tortured and nailed to a cross. But death could not hold Him! The grave could not keep Him from rising again. He finished His work of making a complete atonement to redeem lost sinners, and He now sits at the right hand of God - in a human body - reigning as Lord of the universe.

But Matthew left us last Lord's Day with a lie concocted by Jesus' murderers to cover up His resurrection. A hundred years later, the early church father, Justin Martyr, brought it up in his Dialogues with a Jewish man named Trypho:

"And though all the men in your nation knew the incidents in the life of Jonah, and though Christ said amongst you he would give the sign of Jonah, exhorting you to repent of your wicked deeds, at least *after* he rose again from the dead, and to mourn before God as did the Ninevites, that your nation and city might not be taken and destroyed, as they have been destroyed; *yet*, you have not repented after you learned that he rose from the dead.

Moreover, as I said before, you have sent chosen and ordained men throughout all the world to proclaim that a godless and lawless heresy had sprung from one Jesus, "a Galilean deceiver whom we crucified, but his disciples stole him by night out of the tomb, where he was laid when unfastened from the cross, and now deceive men by asserting that he has risen from the dead and ascended to heaven." (Listen to what he says next to this unbeliever--)

Yet we do not hate you, or those who by your means have conceived such prejudices against us. But we pray that even now all of you may repent and obtain mercy from God, the compassionate and longsuffering Father of all."

"*We do not hate you*, we cry out to God that you might know Jesus as your Savior and Lord!"

That's staggering. But isn't that the very heart of Jesus Christ? Didn't our Lord gasp from the cross, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do?" "Save My enemies, Father! Save those who drove the nails through My feet and My wrists!"

And shouldn't we have His heart for this lost, dying, Christless world? **Beloved, Jesus calls us to come, then He commands us to go.**

If you've understood everything up to this point in the 28th chapter of Matthew's Gospel, but miss what we just read, you've missed the whole point of this Book we have studied for the last 8 years. And if you miss this point, you miss the point of Scripture. You miss the point of *life*.

*If you went around to various churches, small churches, mega-churches; and interviewed a variety of Christians, and asked them, "So what's this Christianity thing all about? What's the bottom line?" - you know what many Christians would say, "Well, it's about how Jesus has made me happier . . . I used to be strung out on drugs and now I'm not . . . Jesus saved my marriage and my family. . . now I have good friends instead of the losers I used to hang out with . . . Jesus helped me with my taxes . . . etc.

I.e., "Christianity is about my personal needs - I'm happier now, I have purpose in my life, and I want my kids to grow up around good people." You know that's what a lot of people would say - and they're not *wrong* that a relationship with Jesus changes your life! It's just what the doc ordered.

Now more mature Christians might say that Christianity is about loving and caring for others. Jesus said, "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, when you love one another." Love your neighbor as yourself. Without love you're just a clanging cymbal. And all of that is true.

Others would say that sound biblical teaching is the purpose of the church. Everything we do centers on the teaching of God's Word "*for the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ.*" (Eph.4.12-13)

And others would say that worship is the highest purpose of the church. Giving God glory through praise, and worship and music. Prayer is often a high priority in these churches.

- The last 3 weeks when I have gotten to church on Sunday morning - *before 6 am* - there have been cars in our cold, dark parking lot! And lights on in in our worship center. Last Sunday I drove around and saw inside, some brothers from the RAV church, the Spanish church who meets here - with hands in the air, praying! Bless their hearts. How that pleases God!

Love and fellowship, teaching and edification, and worship, praise, prayer - these are all what the church is to be doing here on earth. And any church that leaves any of this out, has drifted from their calling.

- But none of these are the *central* mission of the church. ***The #1 central mission of the church is to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen for sinners - to all the nations.***

I read this quote almost 40 years ago, and it rocked my world. Listen. (John MacArthur)—

- If God's primary purpose for the saved were loving fellowship, He would take believers immediately to heaven, where spiritual fellowship is perfect, unhindered by sin, disharmony, or loneliness. If His primary purpose for the saved were the learning of His Word, He would also take believers immediately to heaven, where His Word is perfectly known and understood. And if God's primary purpose for the saved were to give Him praise, He would, again, take believers immediately to heaven, where praise is perfect and unending. There is only one reason the Lord allows His church to remain on earth:

to seek and to save the lost, just as Christ's only reason for coming to earth was to seek and to save the lost. "As the Father has sent Me," He declared, "I also send you" (John 20:21).

That's not all we do, but it's the #1 thing Jesus has us on earth to do. Everything else that we do must feed and fuel this purpose of seeing *Christ exalted among all the nations*.

- Next year will mark our 40th year as Middletown Bible Church. I've been here for almost 3/4ths of that time, and I've been doing a lot of thinking and praying lately about how we're doing and where we're going as a church. And ultimately, we measure that by how we're doing, and where we're going with our Lord's Great Commission. Our mission statement says: *Middletown Bible Church exists to see Jesus Christ exalted and worshiped among all peoples*.

But is that our #1 passion? Our #1 priority? Is it yours?

I could preach a whole series of sermons on the Great Commission, but I'm only going to preach one, and I want to deal with it very practically this morning, because it's meaningless apart from what we *do* about it. You can understand it, believe it, I can preach it - but unless we *do* what it says, we're missing the reason, God has on this earth as His people.

How will we carry out Jesus' command here? I want to draw out of this passage 5 qualities you and I need to obey Jesus' words and fulfill your life mission on earth:

I. Availability.

- Matthew 28:16 ¹⁶Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.

We said last week that Jesus knew that His men were discouraged, depressed over His death, with no expectation that He was going to rise from the dead. So He got them back up on their feet by giving them something to do: "Make the 80 miles trek to Galilee. I'll see you there." He put their faith to work. Faith has to be exercised - like a muscle - or it atrophies. If you don't use it, you can lose it.

But get this: All eleven of these men, *did* what Jesus said. Which means that they were all *available* - to take several days, away from their families - yes, most or all of these men were married and had families - but they were available to obey Jesus.

- You've heard the saying: "The greatest ability is availability." That is absolutely true: You can be the most godly, gifted Christian, but if you are not *available* to serve - all that means nothing. Service to Christ starts with just showing up. Being available.

Don't blow past this: Eleven men, dropped everything and went to Galilee - Jesus said, "Go," so they went. No questions asked. Can you imagine, transporting these men 2,000 years ahead to our busy world today: what kind of response would you expect from eleven men to that kind of command?

- "Uh Jesus, a trip to Galilee really doesn't work with my calendar this week. How about the third week in January?" Right?
- "Oh, uh, Jesus, the wife says that we need some time to get away - you know how brutal the last couple weeks have been with the crucifixion and everything . . ."

- “Jesus, I really do want to obey You, but I’m on the verge of burnout. My therapist says I need some “Me” time.”

Instead, 11 adult men, obeyed. They showed up.

- Jesus said: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. (Matthew 16:24-25)

He meant that! Jesus is Lord of your life, your time, your schedule, your stuff - your home. He expects you and me to be available, whenever, for whatever He asks. And He was hardcore about this. He didn’t cut fair-weather disciples any slack with their excuses—

- Luke 9:57-62 ⁵⁷As they were going along the road, someone said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.” ⁵⁸And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” ⁵⁹To another he said, “Follow me.” But he said, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.” ⁶⁰And Jesus said to him, “Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” ⁶¹Yet another said, “I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home.” ⁶²Jesus said to him, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”

Are you a follower of Jesus or not? Then follow! There’s too much worry about burnout, and self-protection in the church. Aren’t we supposed to serve and let Jesus protect us? *“What He says we will do, where He sends we will go; Never fear, only trust and obey.”*

*Let me tell you what I’ve observed over several decades of being a Christian: Many Christians serve Christ, and they’re very proud of their service. But it’s on their own terms: *if* the ministry opportunity is to their liking, *if* it fits their gifts and abilities, *if* it works with their schedule, *if* all the planets align, *then* they are *available* - as long as nothing else comes up.

- And then there are those servants of Christ who hear of an opportunity that doesn’t fit what they feel gifted to do, the timing is really inconvenient, they don’t even feel spiritually up to it - but there is a need, so they drop everything and go.

I’ll tell you who they are like. They’re like Isaiah, in Isa.6, when he saw a vision of Jesus in all His glorious splendor in the temple. He heard Him ask, *“Who will go for me, and whom shall I send?”* And his immediate response was, *“Here I am - oh, send me!”* Didn’t ask for a minute to check his calendar. Didn’t say, “Well, as long as it doesn’t disrupt my family times.”

- Let me tell you dads: If you want to impact your family for Christ, let them see you drop everything when you get a call from someone in desperate need, and you go. You miss a precious day off, even a family time - to go, and serve Christ. When they see you sacrifice to serve Christ, that will lodge in their minds and hearts forever.

I’ll tell you the blunt, honest truth. And I will bet this is true for most churches in this country: If there is anything that we lack to do more for the sake of the Gospel, for missions, for reaching our own town; it’s not time, money, or plenty of gifted, godly people - it’s *availability*. More Christians who will say, *“Here I am - send me!”*

*Ponder this when you have some time: Middletown Bible Church wouldn’t exist, and you and I wouldn’t be here this morning, if not for the fact that: *“the eleven disciples went to*

Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.” Because that was the beginning of the church! Think about that.

The second thing we need to carry out Jesus’ words is—

II. Worship.

- Matthew 28:17 ¹⁷And when they saw Him *they worshiped* Him, but some doubted.

The word here means to fall on your face to worship. They were in utter awe of Jesus - overwhelmed with love for Him, holding nothing back from Him. Remember doubting Thomas response to Jesus when He appeared to Him? “My Lord, and my God!” Oh, there were no limits on what they would do for Jesus. Eleven of them would be martyred for following Him - and again, that’s why the church is here today, folks.

Here’s the deal: the Great Commission is a call to go out and make more Christ-worshippers. As John Piper has taught us, “*Missions only exists because there are still people and places where worship doesn’t exist.*” The goal toward which all of human history is moving is that day when *at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.* Then our missionary pictures come down from the wall in the lobby! But not until then.

But only passionate, Christ-worshippers will be compelled to go to every nation, and dangerous places that others might worship and give glory to our Savior.

- I just read an article in the Washington Post about Jonathan Allen Chau, the young guy who was killed by the Sentinelese natives when he went to their island to try and convert them to Christ. He didn’t have a plan, didn’t know their language. All he knew was that they were incredibly violent, and they were lost. So he went, and they killed him. The WaPo article said he was mentally ill. I’ll tell you this: his methodology was all wrong, but his heart was sure right.
- I think Jonathan Chau got to heaven and Jesus said, “Well done, good and faithful servant! What in the world were you thinking?” And we don’t know how God might use this man’s death to reach these people. He did that with Jim Elliot, didn’t He?

And then Matthew adds - they worshiped, “*but some doubted.*” Aren’t you glad he added that? Even available, worshiping disciples aren’t perfect, and how does Jesus treat them?

- Matthew 28:18 ¹⁸And Jesus *came* and said to them . .

Literally, He *drew near to them*, and spoke to them. Their faith was still small, but He wanted to comfort them and increase their faith. One of my favorite passages in our study of Matthew is—Matthew 12:20 ²⁰*a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench.*

Jesus deals with His own tenderly, gently, He lifts them up when they fall, He reassures them when they doubt, and He keeps saying, “Come to Me! I’ll give you rest.”

Are you available to go, and are you a Christ-worshiper? And thirdly—

III. Authority.

What Jesus said to His imperfect, sometimes-doubting disciples was this—

- Matthew 28:18 “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. So Go!”

What did He mean? He meant that He is boss over everything in this universe - so go! Jesus Christ is the Sovereign Lord over every world leader, over all of creation - the weather, global warming, disease. He controls it all according to the counsel of His will.

So you can go and make disciples for Jesus from followers of other gods and other religions; comes from knowing that this universe belongs to Jesus. The nations and all its people belong to Him. Nothing can stop your mission because all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Him by His Father. So go!

- Next month, Ashlee Trenerly will go to Cameroon in West Africa, and she can go knowing that King Jesus reigns over that country, it's climate, it's politics, over every evil demonic spirit, and over human heart. And He has His elect there, waiting to hear the Gospel by which they will be brought into His Kingdom.

When you share Christ with your neighbor or a family member this Christmas, you are backed up by this massive, all-inclusive authority of Jesus Christ and His mission to bring in His elect from all nations. That's a staggering thought. We sing it: “His kingdom cannot fail, He rules o'er earth and heaven; the keys to death and hell are to our Jesus given!” And “He will save whom He will save” - nothing can stop Him! How could we sit on our hands or waste our time with lesser things when King Jesus calls us to go?

But let me ask you: Are you in submission to Christ's “*all authority in heaven and on earth?*” Do you obey King Jesus? The church doesn't just go out with His authority, we go out under His authority. As your King, He expects you to obey His orders. And here they are—

- Matthew 28:19-20 ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

Let me break down what He commands you and me to do. The main command in this commission is—

1.) Make disciples.

The word is *mathetes*, and it means a learner, a follower. Everyone knew what Jesus meant when He said, “Go and make *mathetes*.” People would attach themselves to a particular teacher or philosopher, and they would follow that teacher around and obey whatever they said. Think Deadhead, and you're close. That was a *mathetes*. There was another category of person who would go and listen to a teacher or philosopher, but wasn't committed to doing what they heard. They were called “*auditors*.” They were hearers but not doers.

Jesus doesn't say, “Go and make converts. Just get 'em saved!” No, because unless you follow Jesus and obey His word, you aren't a disciple - and you aren't a Christian. We don't call people to just come and get forgiveness of their sins. No! We call people to repent of their sins, make a radical change of direction in their lives, to turn and *follow* King Jesus with all their lives, nothing held back. And nothing less than that. Because Jesus is worthy, Amen?

- I just watched a Youtube of an interview with Helen Roseveare. She is 90 years old on the YouTube, but she went as a single missionary to the Congo back in 1964. She was

captured and held prisoner for 5 months. She was brutalized and raped repeatedly. When she was finally set free she returned to her home in Belfast, Ireland. And 14 months later, she went back. In the video she explains why: because she had fallen in love with Jesus, not just as her Savior and friend, but as her Lord - and to her that meant that she would nothing back for herself, she was at Jesus' disposal. You watch that video and you see a radiant, happy woman.

But I caution you, if you watch that video you will ask yourself, "Do I love Jesus like that? Am I that kind of disciple, who will go wherever Jesus would send me, and do whatever He asks?"

1. - make disciples. 2 - Go, to make disciples.

2.) Go.

- John 10:15-16 Jesus said: I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.
- John 11:51-52 (Caiaphas prophesied) that Jesus would die for the nation, ⁵²and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.

And when Jesus prayed to His Father in His high-priestly prayer, He asked this—

- John 17:18 ¹⁸As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.

Where? Into the whole world. For what purpose? To bring in His elect, from every nation, tribe, and tongue. (panta ta ethne - all the peoples). This is our divine search warrant from Jesus to go out and preach the Gospel so that His elect might be saved.

Folks, that won't happen unless we go. "You mean me?" Well, somebody has to go. If not you, who? You know our analogy that only a few of us are called to actually go down into the well, but if you aren't one of those, then you are definitely called to hold the ropes for those who do.

- And that can mean giving money to those who go - it's not cheap to go to all the nations. And maybe you are called to pray - is there one of us isn't called to pray? You pray as they go, pray while they are there, and pray when they get back. And Jesus told us in Matt.9:38 "*Beg the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.*" Pray this expectantly! God will answer, and the answer might be you praying, "Lord, here I am, please send me?"

And if you aren't even doing this, then ask God to warm up your cold heart, until it beats with His heart to see His Son exalted among all the peoples.

3.) Baptize.

"Go and as you make disciples, dunk them under water!" That's what the word "baptize" means - to immerse. And notice that He says we are to baptize in *the Name* - singular - of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is a strong proof text for the Tri-unity of God. Maybe baptism seems out of place with going and making disciples - it sounds so specific and *physical*. And it is. There's no wiggle room on this command: Jesus said to do it, because it *is* a tangible sign of the obedience of those who are truly His disciples.

I remember many years ago asking Paul Johnson how he could tell who the true converts were down in Mexico where everyone has already been baptized as a baby in the Roman Catholic church. He answered right away: “They are baptized by immersion, as believers!” And that’s true in many countries around the world. It’s true in this country!

- Why did Jesus command water baptism? Well, baptism is loaded with Gospel truth: When you go under the water it symbolizes the old man dying and being buried with Christ; coming up out of the water symbolizes being raised in newness of life with Christ. The whole church needs to see that, don’t we? The most moving times we’ve had here at MBC have been some of our baptisms - they are living proclamations of Christ’s power to save dead sinners and change them into obedient disciples.

And this implies that we must bring disciples into the church. Baptism wasn’t meant to be some private deal by a friend in a nearby river. It’s a church thing, just like the Lord’s Table, it’s something done and shared in the context of the local body of Christ. Which means that true disciples are baptized and part of a local church.

- I’ve told you the story that when I first got saved, I wanted to get baptized. I asked the pastor of a little Church of God in my town to do it. He had his doubts about this young Jesus Freak, and put me off. So I poured a cup of water on my own head over the bathroom sink! As I heard more of God’s Word I realized, that’s not really the way it’s to be done - so in 1973, I was baptized by John MacArthur at Grace Community Church.

And baptism isn’t just a matter of personal obedience, it’s a matter of obedience for every true church. I mean that the church has a responsibility to take a stand on biblical baptism. Just because Christians have differing opinions on baptism doesn’t mean they are all right. We must baptize only those who confess Christ and show evidence of true conversion and we must do it by immersion. And the other side of the coin is that the church has the Christ-given responsibility person not to recognize the profession of a person who refuses biblical baptism.

I will have more to say about this - next year!

4.) Teach.

We are to go, we are to make disciples of all the nations, we are to baptize them, and we are to teach them—

- Matthew 28:20 . . . to observe all that I have commanded you.

How can they follow Jesus if they don’t know His Word? How can they worship Him if they don’t know His Word? And how can they be transformed to be like Jesus apart from His Word? Jesus said we “*live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God!*”

Discipleship is learning Christ’s Word so that we might obey Him and be like Him, and go out and make more disciples for Him, to repeat the process.

Now of course Jesus is talking about all the Scriptures, because He Himself is the author of every word of Scripture - that’s another sermon, but you can trust me on that! But He does say, “*All that I have commanded you,*” which means the New Covenant Scriptures. Old Testament means Old Covenant. We are no longer under the Old Covenant. Yes, every word of your Old Testament is God breathed, and every word is profitable, and every Christian should read all of it - I’ve been reading it all, every year, for about 35 years.

But the OT is the preparation and anticipation of Christ. Paul says “these are the shadows of the reality yet to come. And Christ Himself is the reality” - And that’s what we find in the NT: is the fulfillment and full revelation of Jesus Christ.

- Maybe you’ve wondered, “Why does Pastor teach the NT so much more than the OT?” This is why! I take my cue from Paul himself who said in 2 Cor.3:6 “We are ministers of a new covenant! i.e., the New Testament!”

There is so much more we could say about our Commission from our Lord, but do you notice that it’s all about Him: We go to make disciples, *followers of Jesus*. We baptize them in the name of Jesus, and His Father, and the Holy Spirit, and then we teach them as much as we can for as long as we can to obey everything *Jesus* has commanded.

IV. Power.

And when we do that, as we die to self, and go to hard places, strange, unfamiliar, dangerous places - we go with the most amazing promise Jesus could have possibly made to us—

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

Ego eimi - “I AM” will be with you - until the end of time.

- When we send off Ashlee Trenery, to get on the plane to fly to Cameroon next month - in Africa! I know how long that flight is! - Jesus will be with her! She isn’t just sent there *by* Jesus, she will be sent there *with* Jesus! And with the power of the Holy Spirit. What a promise!

Matthew’s Gospel began with the birth of a Savior—

- “They shall call His name Immanuel, which means “*God with us.*”

And how does it end? “*Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*” As we go to all the nations, making disciples of Jesus Christ, we go in the power and presence of our Ascended, glorious Christ who will never desert us or forsake us. Do you know this Jesus? Will you give your life for the cause of making Him known to others?

Jesus calls us to come, then He commands us to go.

I want to end this message and our series in Matthew with a Youtube - you know, we rarely do this - but I think you will see why. It’s a video of the late Keith Green. If John Baptist had been born a musician, he would have been Keith Green. He was more of a prophet than a musician. And this is from a concert shortly before he was killed in a plane crash, 40 years ago. It’s very emotional, very passionate as he calls on the church of Jesus Christ to wake up and fulfill her Great Commission. Try to overlook the video quality and the 40 year-old hair, and just listen to his message. It’s called *Asleep in the Light*—

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