

"And Make Disciples  
Matthew 28:19, 20  
Pastor Dan Erickson  
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Kari tells her 12-year-old son, "Joey you need to go clean your room." A couple of hours later Joey says, "Mom, you said, 'You need to go clean your room.'" He adds, "Not only have I memorized that, but I have learned to say it in Greek as well as English. Some of my friends are coming over later and we are going to discuss what my room would look like if it was cleaned." Kari says, "Wrong! You are not going to talk about cleaning your room. You *will* do it!"

Folks, I think any good parent would do as Kari did. Yet, as Francis Chan notes, when Jesus tells us to "Go make disciples," modern Christians often seem much better at memorizing or discussing whose words, than we are at doing them.

Friends, for the past year we at Chisholm Baptist Church have been talking a lot about "Making Disciples." Most of you have memorized the fact Chisholm Baptist Church exists to "Love God, love others, and make disciples." Some of you may be thinking, "Okay, enough talk, just do it." Yet, it is important that we have a clear understanding of what making disciples of Jesus Christ means and involves. This will help us be more effective in doing it. Friends, that is our topic today, so let's pause and pray the Lord would enable us to hear and heed His word this morning.

Let me start by noting that Chisholm Baptist Church has been about making disciples for 116 years. In fact, the verses that have served as guide for our ministry, at least for the 29 years that I have been the Senior pastor, are Matthew 22:37-40 the great commandments, love God, love others, and Matthew 28:19,20, make disciples. Yet, in the past year, the leaders of this church, pastors and deacons, have realized the Lord wants us to be more focused and more intentional about making disciples. We want to do a better job at the job God has given us.

Last week we noted that loving God and loving other people is always what the Lord expects from us as individuals and as a congregation. And then He has a specific assignment for us, the great commission. That is what we call the passage in the Bible from which we get the phrase "*Make*

*disciples.*" **Matthew 28:19,20 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.** As we consider this passage, here are nine things to keep in mind. Yes, nine. That is a lot. I guess it seems more like a lesson than a sermon, but all nine are important. So, hang in there, pay attention, by God's grace you can do it.

**Number 1** – Jesus commands his followers to "make disciples." In the Greek text, that is the only active imperative or command in the passage. The other words go or going, baptizing and teaching are participles. Another way to translate verse 19 would be "as you are going" or "wherever you go," *make disciples*. My point is simply that the focus of Jesus' commission is clearly to *make disciples*. To go, baptize and teach are thing we are to be doing to fulfill that task.

**Number 2** - This is a command for all believers in Jesus Christ. Jesus spoke these words as He met with his followers, the apostles, after His resurrection, and shortly before He ascended to heaven. Some claim Jesus was giving this assignment only to the apostles. Yet, the fact Jesus said these words to these men, doesn't mean they are not for us. Every book in the Bible was written by a particular individual to particular people at a particular time, in a particular place. The book of Ephesians, for example, was written by the apostle Paul to a group of Christians living in the city of Ephesus in about 61 A.D. Yet, Ephesians, every part of that book, is also God's word for us, here in northern Minnesota in the year of our Lord 2022. Unless there is clear evidence within the Biblical text that it is meant to be applied only by the original, first century audience, we should assume these are God's words for us. The evidence seems clear that God expects both His first century and 21<sup>st</sup> century followers to be "disciple makers."

**Number 3** - All believers in Jesus Christ are to be His disciples. Some folks think that being a Christian and being a disciple are two different

things. The idea seems to be that believing in Jesus makes you a Christian, and then, if you choose, you can take the second step and become a *follower* of Jesus, and that makes you a disciple. Yes, to be a disciple involves following Jesus' teaching and examples. Yet I would suggest a Christian is really a believer in and follower of Jesus. Now, don't get confused. At this church we are very careful, very diligent, about making sure we are proclaiming the great news, the gospel, *that salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone*. This is believing in or trusting in Jesus. This is how someone receives Jesus as savior. The initial/immediate result of this salvation is what we call being justified or justification. A big word, but important word. The moment, when by God's grace, you trust in Jesus Christ, you are declared not guilty, your sins are forgiven, and the righteousness of Jesus Christ is considered to be your own. This is sometimes called the great exchange, Jesus takes your sin and gives you His righteousness. Or as I like to say, your failing score is erased, and Jesus' perfect score is written beside your name.

So, **Romans 5:1 since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ**. This peace with God means every believer will be welcomed into heaven, either when he/she dies, or the Lord Jesus returns. This is incredibly good news, and it is certainly something to celebrate.

Yet, this is only part of what happens when someone trusts in Jesus Christ. That individual has been regenerated or been made alive spiritually. It is also referred to as being born again, born of God, or born of the Spirit. Those all mean the same thing. And I think it is what the apostle Paul is referring to in **2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come**. That seems pretty clear, if anyone is in Christ, if anyone is a Christian, that person is a new creation. This is not because of changes in lifestyle someone is choosing to make, but because every believer in Jesus has been given spiritual life by the Holy Spirit and is now indwelt by that spirit. And part of that newness is a desire to follow Jesus. I think every genuine believer in Jesus wants, in some degree, to be a follower of Jesus, a disciple.

**Number 4** – Some Christians follow Jesus more closely than others do. You might say some Christians are better disciples, but I don't think that is the best phrase. As I just said, all who truly believe in Jesus have some type of desire to follow Him, but some follow from a distance, and others kind of stray off the path even as they are trying to follow Him. Another way we describe this is by speaking of varying degrees of spiritual maturity. You might hear something like this: "Jane is a mature believer, but her husband, Bob, is a baby Christian." That means we expect Jane will be following Jesus more closely than Bob. We also may refer to this as the process of sanctification. That big word simply means becoming more holy or becoming more like Jesus in our character. If Jane is farther down that path of sanctification than Bob is, then we would say she is following Jesus more closely than he is.

Now, spiritual maturity doesn't necessarily correspond to how long someone has been a Christian. For example, Bob may have been a Christian for 20 years, but has been "developmentally delayed" in his life and after two decades is still like a baby Christian. Jane, on the other hand, may have only been a Christian for three years, but during this time has grown rapidly in her faith. She is now much more spiritually mature than her husband.

Unfortunately, "developmentally delayed" seems to describe more than a few Christians. These folks have professed to be believers in Jesus for years, but they don't exhibit much evidence of spiritual maturity and don't seem to be following Jesus very closely. According to the apostle Paul there were people like this in the church at Corinth. **1 Corinthians 3:1 But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people. But as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ**.

Other Bible verses say these people are "carnal" or "worldly." Paul adds, **1 Corinthians 3:2 I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready**. Paul is giving them a bottle of spiritual baby formula because they are not following Jesus' most basic instructions of treating each other with love and kindness.

Now, a quick, but important note: A so called "carnal Christian," someone who is truly a believer in Jesus, but is not living like one, is very

different from someone who professes to be a believer in Jesus, but really is not. A “carnal” Christian has been regenerated and indwelt by the Spirit. He/she is a new creation in Christ.

This is not true of someone who makes an empty profession of faith, claims to be a believer in Jesus, but really is not. A carnal Christian will be in heaven, while someone whose profession of faith is false will not be. From the outside it is often impossible for us to know whether someone is a carnal Christian or if his/her faith is simply not real. I believe that because carnal Christians do have a God given desire to follow Jesus, they will eventually do that to some degree, and will not remain spiritual infants forever.

Okay, back to Jane and Bob. They are both genuine believers in Jesus, but Jane is much more spiritually mature. There will be days, however, when Bob seems to be following Jesus more closely. Jane, like every other believer in Jesus, no matter how spiritually mature, is simultaneously a saint/sinner. She still struggles with what we call a sinful nature. There will be plenty of times when she fails to love God and other people as she should. So, there may be times when Jane and Bob get in an argument, and Bob’s attitude and words are more pleasing to the Lord than Jane’s are. Yet, in general, it is correct to say she is more spiritually mature than Bob is and is following Jesus more closely.

And just one more note: Just because in my example the wife is the more spiritually mature partner, there is no reason why a husband cannot be more spiritually mature than his wife. Guys don’t be spiritual wimps. Make it your goal to follow Jesus even more closely than your wife does.

**Number 5** – Making disciples or disciple making involves helping other people become believers in Jesus and help them follow Jesus more closely. There is nothing magic about that phrase. We could also say helping people to grow to spiritual maturity or helping folks become more like Jesus in their character, or helping people become the man or woman God wants them to be. These phrases all refer to the same thing.

An important aspect of this involves helping others become disciple makers as well. This is something Pastor Mark will focus on next week.

The apostle Paul gives these instructions in **2 Timothy 2:2 and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.**

So, making disciples involves making disciple makers. Part of helping someone follow Jesus includes helping them obey the instructions He gives us in Matthew 28:19,20, the great commission. Someone who is not helping other people become believers in and followers of Jesus is not really following Jesus, is not really living as a disciple. Again, Pastor Mark plans to focus on this more next Sunday.

**Number 6** – Making disciples begins with proclaiming or sharing the great news of salvation by grace, through faith in Jesus Christ alone. Often, including here at Chisholm Baptist Church, evangelism and discipleship have been divided into two separate aspects of ministry. Evangelism is helping unbelievers become believers in Jesus, and discipleship is helping believers in Jesus to follow Him. That is fine, but I think it is better to understand these as simply two phases of disciple making. Why? Well, first because that is how the Bible describes it. Jesus is not telling the apostles to go to existing believers in Jesus and help them grow in their faith. There really were not existing believers at that time to train. When Peter preached the gospel on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, this was the first phase of making disciple.

Second, this keeps us from having to make a judgement about whether or not someone’s profession of faith is genuine. Listen carefully. I know numerous folks who I suspect are not genuine Christians even though they profess to be. Why do I say this? Because often these individuals seem to think being baptized or repeating a prayer is what makes them a Christian rather than trusting in Jesus Christ. Yet, as a disciple maker I don’t have to know whether someone’s profession of faith is real or not.

One of the first things I want to do as a disciple maker is to help a person who claims to be a Christian understand that salvation is by grace, through faith in Jesus Christ alone. If at that point he confirms this is something he has been doing, *wonderful*. If, however, she confesses she has really been relying on baptism or a prayer, or anything besides Jesus, it is even more wonderful.

More wonderful that is, if by God's grace she then truly puts her faith in Jesus Christ. The disciple making process helps us confirm that people are truly trusting in Jesus Christ, and this truly saved.

**Number 7** – (Just three more to go.) We are to be involved in making disciples outside of our own church and community. Earlier I noted that the great commission does not contain a specific command to go anywhere. But the command is to make disciple of *all nations*. The Greek word is “ethnos” so it could be translated people's or ethnicities. That will involve some people going to other parts of the world to make disciples. Many of us, however, are called to stay here and in various ways, support those making disciples in other places.

We often refer to these folks as missionaries, but I think our new label, “global partners” is really more accurate. These missionary type folks we support are our partners as we as a church seek to make disciples outside of our community and in other parts of the world. For most of us, our focus will be on making disciples in our communities here on the Iron Range. Helping people we know, friends and family members, believe in and follow Jesus. But we also have the responsibility to make disciple of all nations. Pastor Mark likes to add that phrase when we recite our purpose statement, “Love God, love others and make disciples of *all nations*.” That is indeed something God calls us to do.

**Number 8** – Part of disciple making is baptizing believers. We are to make disciples, **Matthew 28:19b Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.** This means we are to encourage people to be baptized. Trying to force people into or under the water really doesn't work. Now baptism has long been a controversial topic within Christianity. Some churches practice infant baptism. Others, like ours, do believer baptisms, requiring an individual to make a credible profession of faith before he/she is baptized. Yet, this disagreement must not keep us from doing what Jesus has called us to do. So, in our church, we need to be encouraging believers in Jesus to be baptized. It is part of following Jesus and being a disciple. And it is a wonderful opportunity to testify of one's faith. And these folks are to be baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

This is a reminder of how central the Trinity, the triune God, is to not just Christian theology, but to the Christian life. One of the things we need to be doing as we make disciple at Chisholm Baptist Church is to help people see not only what the doctrine of the trinity means, but how it impacts our lives.

**Number 9** – We will never complete or finish the task of making disciples. That is partly because, until Jesus returns, there are always more people who need to hear the gospel and become believers in and followers of Jesus Christ. The other reason is because all believers in Jesus, all disciples, need to be continuing to grow in their faith. None of us are following Jesus as closely as we should be. Jesus makes it clear the disciple making process is a huge project when He says we are to be **Matthew 28:20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.** And friends, the sinful acts, sinful attitudes, and failure to do all that God calls me to do makes it clear that I have not fully grasped everything that Jesus has commanded. So not only do I need to be making disciples, but I also need to continue to be *made* a disciple. I need people who encourage me to do that and help me to do that. And friends, you do as well.

Okay, that's all folks....

Nine important aspects of disciple making. I think you can see these are not so much points to memorize, but truth that explains what the Lord calls us to do. In an effort to make sure we are doing that; our Church Board has come up with this statement:

*“By God's grace, we commit to being disciples who make disciples. As followers of Jesus Christ, we want out actions and words to advance the gospel both locally and globally. We also desire to equip believers to grow in loving obedience to the Lord through his Word (Matthew 28:18-20).”*

And I encourage you to be doing it this week, make disciples. And then make sure you come back next Sunday or listen online as Pastor Mark focuses on one very important aspect of our assignment: Making disciples who make disciples.

