Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Making Disciples of All Nations, Part 1
Scripture: Matthew 28:6-18a
Code: 2404

INTRODUCTION

A. The Mission of the Church

Apparently many people do not understand the mission of the church. Some might come to church when convenient enjoy everything provided for them. They're involved to the degree that it meets particular needs in their lives. However, they don't seem to understand what the mission of the church really is. Much less are they wholeheartedly dedicated to the fulfillment of that mission.

1. Its essential elements

If we were to survey people in a church and ask them to name the primary purpose of the church, we might get answers like this:

a) Fellowship

Some might suggest the church is primarily a place to make friends with godly people who strengthen your life and enjoy the best of music and recreation. It's a place where love is cultivated and shared. All that is certainly important because Jesus said all men will know we are His disciples if we love one another (John 13:35), but there's more to the church than that.

b) Teaching

One step higher would be to suggest that the mission of the church is teaching: to give sound doctrine to strengthen believers, to train people for various responsibilities in the church, and to instruct children and young people in obedience to the law of God with an objective of bringing them to maturity in Christ. That mission is a very important part of the church's ministry, but it is not its primary mission.

c) Praise

A step higher would be to suggest that the main purpose of the church is to praise God. The church is a community of praise that exalts God for who He is and what He has done. It has been suggested

that since praise is the central activity of heaven, it must also be the primary responsibility of those on earth.

2. Its primary motive

As important as fellowship, teaching, and praise are, the primary motive of the church is to glorify God. The apostle Paul described salvation as being "to the praise of the glory of his grace" and then declared, "unto him be glory in the church" (Eph. 1:6; 3:21).

Jesus Himself came to reveal the glory of the Father. John 1:14 teaches that Christ was the glory of God manifested. Hebrews 1:3 declares Christ to be "the express image of his person." Like our Savior, we also are to glorify God.

3. Its redemptive history

a) God's initiative to save

The sin of Adam brought death to the human race. Immediately, God set out to redeem man back to Himself out of His gracious love. It was God who came into the Garden and said, "Adam ... Where art thou?" (Gen. 3:9). That illustrates it is God who initiates the saving work. Fallen, unredeemed man does not seek after God (Rom. 3:11-12). God is the seeker.

b) God's desire to save

From the first call, "Adam ... Where art thou?" (Gen. 3:9) to the last call, "The Spirit and the bride say, Come" (Rev. 22:17) God longs to redeem fallen man to Himself. It glorifies God when sinners are saved.

Scripture states that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself" (2 Cor. 5:19). God invaded human history and became a man to do that which was the supreme desire of His heart: glorifying Himself as God by redeeming sinful men and women. That is the single greatest act of our holy God.

c) God's promise to save

God's said to Abraham, "In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 12:3). From the very beginning, God wanted to redeem all the families of the earth. It was never His intention to select and isolate Israel as if they were the only people He cared about. Israel was the missionary people through whom God desired to reach the world. That's why He said to Israel, "I will ... give thee for a light to the nations, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth" (Isa. 49:6).

God loved a lost world and sought to win it to Himself for His own glory. Christ came into the world out of love and sought to win it for the Father's glory. Believers also are to go to the world in love and to seek to reach it for the glory of God. The church's mission is the same as God's.

Jesus said, "This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. I have glorified thee on the earth" (John 17:3-4). Reconciling man to God is the greatest way to glorify God. That's the reason Christ came (Luke 19:10). Believers are an extension of the ministry of God the Father and Son in receiving glory by the salvation of lost sinners: " As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world" (John 17:18). "As" conveys intention. As the Father sent the Son into the unredeemed world, so the Son has sent believers. We have no different mission in the world than the incarnate Jesus Christ.

B. The Process of Making Disciples

Jesus' Great Commission in Matthew 28 is essential to understanding the mission of the church, which in practical terms is this: "Go ... and make disciples" (Matt. 28:19, NASB).

1. Its meaning

The Greek verb translated "make disciples" (matheteuo) is a command. From the noun form one derives the word disciple or learner. Believers are to make learners or disciples of Christ--people who come to them to be trained.

a) The example of Christ

John 4:1 says that Jesus made and baptized disciples. Even though matheteuo doesn't appear there, the expression that is used conveys the same sense.

b) The example of the early church

Acts 14:21 says, When they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned." The apostles went out into various cities and made disciples.

2. Its importance

After the gospel of Matthew, that specific command to make disciples is not repeated. Perhaps making disciples is so innate to the nature of redeemed life that it begs the issue to repeat it.

There are as many opportunities to reach a lost world as there are people who are lost in the world. Believers have tremendous capability to reach the world for Christ, but so many are constrained by a lack of commitment and useless trivialities while people go on living without the saving message of

the gospel.

The Prerequisite for Success

S.D. Gordon has written a book entitled, Quiet Talks with World Winners (N.Y.: Eaton & Mains, 1908). It describes a group of people who were preparing to ascend Mount Blanc in the Swiss Alps. On the evening before the climb, the guides outlined the prerequisite for success. They said because of the difficulty of the climb, one could reach the top only by taking the necessary equipment for climbing and leaving behind all unnecessary accessories.

A young Englishman disagreed and proceeded along with a blanket, food and drink, and a cap and notebook. On the way to the summit of Mount Blanc, guides began to notice certain items left behind on the way: first the food, then the notebook, then the cap. Finally when they reached the top, they discovered he was there, having jettisoned everything in the process. At least he made it.

S.D. Gordon made this application to the Christian life: "Many of us, when we find we can't make it to the top with our loads, let the top go, and pitch our tents in the plain, and settle down with our small plans and accessories. The plain seems to be quite full of tents" (p. 55). The question we must all ask ourselves is, Do I have too many accessories preventing me from fulfilling the mission God has given me?

LESSON

Now what is necessary for effective evangelism if we're to make disciples of all nations?

I. AVAILABILITY (v. 16)

"Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them."

"Then" might be better translated "so." It's a simple connective reflecting the response of the disciples to Jesus' instruction in Matthew 26:32: "After I am raised up again, I will go before you into Galilee." After the resurrection an angel said to the woman at the tomb, "[Christ] goeth before you into Galilee. There shall ye see him" (28:7). Jesus Himself soon thereafter told the women the same thing (v. 10). So before and after the resurrection, Jesus said He would meet with His disciples in Galilee. He was calling together a great conclave for the purpose of commissioning them to reach the world. Word spread beyond the eleven disciples to all the others who believed in Jesus Christ, and they were all gathered at the mountain waiting for Him.

A. The Time Frame

We have don't know how Jesus communicated to them the precise time and place. By His own discretion and will, He made those things known. We do know that the time of the gathering was after His resurrection. On the day of His resurrection He met Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9-11), went on the road to Emmaus (Mark 16:12-13), saw the disciples that night in the upper room (Mark 16:14), and again eight days later (John 20:26-31). So it would be at least after that eighth day. And after that time, the disciples would need a certain amount of time to journey north into Galilee. When they came into Galilee, they went fishing (John 21:1-4) so that took time as well.

Acts 1:3 says that Jesus showed Himself alive "by many infallible proofs" over a period of forty days, after which he ascended into heaven from the Mount of Olives. Therefore the gathering was probably between twenty and forty days after the resurrection. It wouldn't be at the end of the forty days, however, because the Mount of Olives is outside Jerusalem, and they would have needed another few days to arrive back. So possibly between twenty and thirty-five days after His resurrection, Jesus called together a special group of people for a very special commissioning.

B. Those Who Were There

1.Their number

First Corinthians 15 tells us the resurrected Christ "was seen of above five hundred brethren at once.... After that, he was seen ... of all the apostles" (vv. 6-7). It is the consistent view of Bible teachers throughout the years that those were probably the ones gathered on the mountain.

According to Matthew 28:16 the eleven disciples were at the mountain. The women were probably there too because of what the angel said to them in 28:7. So the mission was for the eleven, the women, and presumably all the other believers in Galilee who were to be commissioned for the responsibility of reaching the world.

The command to make disciples of all nations doesn't know any hierarchy: it's a command given to everyone who loves and follows Jesus Christ.

2.Their location

It is reasonable to assume our Lord desired to give this commission to the largest group of people possible, and that would have been the 500 gathered in Galilee, because more believers were in Galilee than in Jerusalem.

According to Acts 1:15 when the believers met in Jerusalem to wait for the Holy Spirit, there were only 120 people in the upper room. In Jerusalem the number of disciples was smaller and the hostility

was much greater.

Also it was the people of Galilee who had been most responsive to Christ's earthly ministry. Matthew 4:15-16 says He came as a light to the people of Galilee. Because of its seclusion, Galilee was away from the hostility of Jerusalem and there could easily be found a place to gather on the many hillsides around the sea. Galilee, then, provided the largest group of disciples, the greatest seclusion and safety, and the strategic location of being surrounded by many nations who needed to hear the gospel.

Scripture does not reveal the exact mountain where they gathered. It may have been where He was transfigured, where He taught the Sermon on the Mount, where He fed the crowd, where He often prayed, or some other mountain.

C. The Importance of Obedience

With all their weaknesses, confusion, doubts, and fears, the people gathered together. Perhaps they were not the greatest people in the world, or the most capable, or brilliant, but they were available. They were ready for service, and that made them precious in God's sight.

Everything at this point focuses on the fact that they were there. Jesus said to be there and they were. That is reminiscent of the availability of Isaiah, who said immediately after seeing a vision of God, "Here am I; send me" (Isa. 6:8).

To be truly fulfilled in this life, you have to be available to God. Offer your time, talents, gifts, and resources before the Lord to be used as He would desire. Because the people gathering on the mountain were available, they had the privilege of meeting the resurrected Christ and being commissioned by Him, receiving promises of His presence and power.

II. WORSHIP (vv. 17-18a)

Another attitude essential to making disciples is worship, which is an indication of the believer's focus.

A. All Worshiped (v. 17a)

"And when they saw him, they worshiped him."

In a supernatural way, Christ could transfer Himself from one place to another. His instantaneous appearance created such an effect that everyone worshiped Him. The Greek word translated "worshiped" speaks of prostrating oneself in adoring worship. Christ was not worshiped as a human dignitary or earthly king, but as the Son of God--God in human flesh.

When Christ walked on the water, the disciples worshiped the God who controls the elements (Matt. 14:33). Now their awe must have been even greater because He had risen from the dead. So when He appeared, they worshiped Him.

B. Some Doubted (v. 17b-18a)

"But some doubted. And Jesus came."

1.The reason for the doubt

Some suggest that the doubters were the eleven disciples just mentioned in verse 16. We really don't know. It may help to consider the nature of the doubt. The text doesn't say some doubted that Jesus was alive. The indication is that when they saw Him, they all worshiped Him, but some doubted whether it was truly Christ. The doubt isn't necessarily a reference to His resurrection but to His identity.

That could have happened among the eleven. Some of them may not have been able to see His face clearly, and perhaps He was revealing Himself in a different way from how He had appeared in resurrection glory in the upper room. Possibly they were uncertain of His identity and hesitant to affirm it until they had further evidence.

If the women were there, along with the group of 500 and the eleven disciples, the doubting could have included any of them. Apart from the women and the disciples, apparently none of the others had seen Him after His resurrection until now.

2.The removal of the doubt

But "Jesus came" and the doubt did not remain. His coming indicates the probable cause of the doubt: that Jesus was at a distance and could not be recognized by everyone. Most likely when He came near and began to speak, the initial doubts turned into confident faith, and eventually each disciple worshiped Him.A Vivid Lesson on Availability

I can remember as a teenager lying on the highway, having been thrown out of a car traveling seventy-five miles an hour. I slid over a hundred yards on my back. Lying on the side of the road, I cried out in my heart, "O God, I know that You control my life. Thank You for saving my life, and whatever You want me to be, that's what I'll be. I'm available!" It doesn't have to come to that point for you. For me it did.

CONCLUSION

God desires a heart that is available at the appointed place and time to hear His orders. He also desires true worship. The believer's whole affection and mind is to be set on Christ. All his goals are directed toward Him. He is his all in all.

Are you available? Are you a worshiper? Is your intent and purpose in life focused on the Person of Christ? Having those attitudes means being controlled by the Holy Spirit, who is the only One who can cause you to call Jesus Lord (1 Cor. 12:3). All our possessions, time, energy, talent, and gifts are to be under His control. It also means being centered on the Word because the Word is where Christ is seen. You gaze at His glory in the Word.

The ending of Matthew sums up everything previously stated in the gospel. As Christ came into the world to give His life to bring people to Himself, so the believer is to do likewise.

Focusing on the Facts

1. True or false: Most people probably understand the mission of the church.

2. Name three essential elements that can be mistaken for the church's mission.

3. What is the greatest motive of the church?

4. Who took the initiative to save the lost?

5. What is the single greatest act of God?

6. Explain how the church's mission is the same as God's.

7. What is the greatest way to glorify God?

8. What does it mean to make disciples?

9. Why apparently is the command to make disciples not repeated?

10. What can hinder a believer from the many opportunities to reach the lost world?

11. What attitude does Matthew 28:16 imply is necessary for effective evangelism?

12. Where did Christ give the command to make disciples?

13. What is another necessary attitude for fulfilling Christ's commission (Matt. 28:17-18a)?

14. True or false: The doubt of the people on the mountain was directly related to the resurrection of Christ.

15. How apparently were the doubts of the people removed?

16. Having the attitudes of availability and worship means being controlled by and being centered on _____ .

Pondering the Principles

1. When Goliath defied the nation of Israel, David showed he was available to serve the Lord, saying, "Is there not a cause?... Let no man's heart fail because of him; thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine.... This day will the Lord deliver [Goliath] into mine hand ... that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel" (1 Sam. 17:29-46). Have you sensed a need to be available to God so that the lost world around you might know "that there is a God"? In view of opportunities to reach the lost world, are you available for service?

2. Scripture shows that Anna, the prophetess, had a worshipful attitude. She "departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And she ... gave thanks ... unto the Lord, and spoke of him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem" (Luke 2:37-38). To fulfill the commission of making disciples, an attitude of worship is necessary. Is that attitude evident in your life?

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