Matthew 28:18-20 *Disciples Who Make Disciples: Disciple Making*

***The Commission***I appreciate Keegan’s thoughts. I am excited to see how God is developing so many of our teens into disciples and leaders.

As Keegan indicated, we are talking about discipleship. Last week we began a new series of sermons we are calling “Disciples who Make Disciples.” That’s kind of our goal. We are at the beginning of a new school year, which also serves as the beginning of a new church year. And so we usually use the sermons at this time of year to lay out a vision and a challenge for Hope Church. And our vision, this year, our emphasis, is on “disciples who make disciples.” That’s our goal. That we will all be disciples of Jesus who are actively helping to make other disciples of Jesus.

So our theme verse for this sermon series is **Matthew 4:19:**

**19**“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.”

This is why we have the fishing gear up here. It’s kind of the dominant image for this series. Last week I said this is Jesus’ job description for what it means to be a disciple. We defined a disciple of Jesus as someone who:

* Has made a decision to follow Jesus (with their heads)
* Is open to being changed by Jesus (in their hearts)
* And is available to be on mission for Jesus (with their hands).

Jesus said: “Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” In other words: “Be my disciple, and I will help you make more disciples.”

So last week, we talked about the first part of our series title: “Disciples.” We defined what a Disciple is. Now, this week, we are going to talk about the second part: “who make Disciples.” We are going to look a bit more closely at Jesus’ call to help others follow Him.

Our scripture passage this morning is one that may be familiar to many of you. It’s **Matthew 28:18-20**. A passage that is commonly referred to as the Great Commission:

**18**Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. **19**Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20**and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

As I said, this is the Great Commission. A commission, according to the dictionary, is an instruction, command or duty that is given to a person or a group of people. Basically, it’s job that is given to people to do. So you might commission an architect to design a building for you. You might commission a musician to create a song. You commission a general to lead an army. You commission a real estate agent to sell your property. And so on.

So here, Jesus is giving a job to His followers. He’s commissioning them to a specific task. And it’s a big job, so it is a Great Commission. And at the heart of it is the instruction to “make disciples.”

I really want to dig into this passage with you this morning. And we’re going to do so in a couple of ways. First, I’d like to give you an overview of the commission. I’d like to kind of set the command of Jesus in context by framing it in the things He says immediately before and after it.

And then, second, we’ll look more closely at the command itself to see how Jesus wants us to carry it out.

***The Great Claim***

So first, let’s get an overview of the passage. Let’s frame it with what Jesus says before and after. We’ll begin with the **Great Claim.** Here’s how Jesus begins this passage. **Verse 18:**

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

As we consider the enormity of the great commission it’s a good idea to remember who is giving it. This is the Resurrected Jesus, some 40 days after the stone was rolled away and He emerged victorious over Satan, sin, and death. The enemy has been defeated, death couldn’t hold Him down. He walked out of His own grave.

And because Jesus has triumphed so gloriously over guilt and condemnation and suffering and death and Satan, therefore "God has highly exalted him and given him a name that is above every name that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:9-11). Which is just another way of saying: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to [him]."

All authority. That means that He has authority over politics and governments, over elections and congressional investigations.

All authority. That means that He has authority over all armies and military might, over terrorists in Afghanistan and insurgents in Iraq.

All authority. That means He has authority over business and the economy, over the Dow Jones and the real estate market and banks.

All authority. That means He has authority over all entertainment and media, over reality TV and pop music and Hollywood and the internet.

All authority. That means He has authority over all nations. That means He has authority over those who believe and those who don’t believe. That means He has authority over every soul and every moment of every life that has been or ever will be lived

And so, when He commissions us to go and make disciples of all nations, He’s telling us that there is no place we could visit and no situation we could encounter where He is not in complete and total control.

***The Gracious Comfort***

But there’s more. The end of the great commission contains what I will call the **Gracious Comfort.**  The end of **verse 20:**

And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

Not only does Jesus claim to have all authority in heaven and on earth, He also promises to be with His followers always. At all times. Notice the “alls” in this passage. Jesus tells us to go to “all nations.” He claims to have “all authority.” And now He tells us He will be with us “always.”

Always. That means He’s there when you and your spouse have such a terrible argument you don’t even know why you got married in the first place.

Always. That means He’s there when you get the call at twelve after one that your teenager is at the sheriff’s office and could you please come pick him up.

Always. That means He’s there when your hopes are dashed, when your job disappears, when your friends disappoint you, when your bank account scrapes bottom, when loved ones die, when your country goes to war…

Always. That means He’s there when you invite your neighbor to come to church, when you talk about God with your college aged son or daughter, when you take out a rake and help an elderly person with their yard, or when you get on a plane to fly to Haiti.

Always. Jesus promises to be with you always.

The framing is important. The things Jesus says immediately before and after He gives His Great Commission provide vital context. Jesus has a big job for us. We’re going to look at it in just a moment. But He wants us to know that He has all authority—He is powerfully in control—and that He is with us always—He is graciously present. There is no situation we could get into that God is not in charge of; and no place we could go where Jesus will not go with us.

There’s a phrase I like to use that says “A strong faith in a strong God makes strong Christians.” And I think that’s what Jesus is saying to us here. When we remember what an awesome God it is that we serve, and we remember that He promises to be with us always, then no risk we could undertake on His behalf will be too big.

***The Giant Command***So now, we’re ready to look at Jesus’ instructions. This is the part that I’ll call the **Giant Command.** **Verse 19 and the beginning of verse 20:**

**19**Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20**and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

Jesus is deputizing us to tell the world about Him. His plan for sharing the good news of salvation is through the words and actions of the followers He left here on earth. The way He is going to grow the church is through the work of the people who are already in it.

This is a further explanation of what Jesus meant when He called the first disciples to be fishers of men.

Now, we usually think of this is as a missionary text. This is a passage that we often reference when we talk about the importance of sharing the gospel to the ends of the earth. And it is that. Notice the phrase “of all nations.” That means Jesus desires for us to share His message with all kinds of people, in every part of the world. It’s not just a Jewish thing. Not just a white thing. Not just a middle class thing. All nations means everybody.

But fulfilling this commission does not mean that we all have to travel overseas. This verse is for more than just career missionaries. This giant command of Jesus is something we are all supposed to be doing, every day.

Now, to see this, I’m going to have to go full on language nerd for a little bit. For us to fully grasp what Jesus is charging us to do, I’m going to have to give you a grammar lesson.

So, as you look at the verse, I want you to notice that there are four main verbs, four action words. They are **“go”, “make disciples”, “baptizing” and “teaching.”** We’ll underline them on the screen.

Now, it is not immediately obvious in English, but in the original language one of these verbs is an imperative, and the other three are participles. What does that mean? I’m glad you asked…

An imperative verb is a verb that tells you what to do. It’s a command. In English, imperative verbs are often a single action-word followed by an exclamation mark, like: “Run!” or “Fight!” or “Finish your homework!” So one of these words is an imperative verb. It is the main instruction in the sentence.

The other three underlined words are participles. Participles are strange things. They are verbs that are being used as adjectives. Essentially, participles are verbs that modify other verbs. In English, participles are usually formed by adding “-ing” to the end of a verb. “Swimming” and “running” and “eating” can all be participles.

So, again, in this text there are three participles and one imperative verb. This is the key. Because whichever word is the imperative verb is the word that tells you what to do.  Whichever words are the participles tell you how to do it.

So, let’s **do an example:**

Taking out the trash, sweeping the floor, and wiping down the counters, clean the kitchen!

Which is the imperative verb? “Clean.” That’s the command. That’s what you are supposed to do.

And which are the participles? “Taking, sweeping, and wiping”. Those are the modifiers. They explain how you are supposed to accomplish the command. Does that make sense?

Let’s **do one more:**

Tune up the car; changing the oil, checking the plugs, replacing the distributor cap.

The imperative is….tune up the car. That’s the thing to do. And the way to do it is by changing the oil, checking the plugs, and replacing the distributor cap. Those are the participles.

Are you with me so far? I’m sorry to get so geeky, it should make sense in a minute.

So, let’s **put our verse back up**. As I said, one of these words is an imperative verb and the other three are participles. Do you know which is which yet?

You’ve probably already guessed that “baptizing” and “teaching” are both participles. The “-ing” is a pretty good clue. But with “go” and “make disciples” it’s harder to tell. English doesn’t make it real clear.

I think most of us assume that “go” must be the imperative. Jesus is giving us our marching orders. He wants us to get a move on. He wants us to go to the nations making disciples, baptizing them, and teaching them.

But, in actuality, (and it probably won’t surprise you, given the title of today’s sermon) the imperative verb in this verse is “make disciples.” When Jesus gives His Great Commission the thing He really wants us to do, the thing He is commanding us, is to make disciples.

In fact—and here I’m going to get all technical again—in the original Greek this is just one word—not a verb/noun combination. It’s the word “disciple” turned into a verb. So instead of saying “make a disciple” like you would say “build a house’ or “grill a steak” what it says is: “disciple-make” or, more simply: “disciple!”

A blogger named Kenny Burchard, whose post helped me through all the grammar, says it like this:

So, in the great commission in Matthew, *disciple* is not an outcome (like a product that you end up with), but it is rather a *process* that you are *doing*.  The grammar is not telling us to make an object.  There is no noun in the text at all.  There is only a single imperative verb.  Only a command.  Only an action word.  Only something to *do*.  And what is it? It is “disciple!” (<http://thinktheology.org/2013/11/07/greek-geeking-the-great-commission-in-matthew/>)

So, let’s take a breath. What we’ve learned is that Jesus makes a great claim: all authority belongs to Him; and He gives us a gracious promise: He will be with us always. And so, in light of that, He gives us a Giant Command.

And at the heart of that Giant Command, He wants us to make disciples. To disciple people in a relationship with Jesus Christ. More than just proclaiming the good news so that people can say a prayer and ask Jesus into their hearts, Jesus is commanding us to come alongside people and help them grow in their relationship with Him.

So how do we do that? Here’s where the participles come in. Here’s where we have to pay attention to the other action words in this verse:

***What to Do***

So**, Going**. One of the ways we make disciples is by going.

Now, this doesn’t necessarily mean “go on a mission trip” or “go somewhere.” Remember, this is a participle. It conveys a continuous action that is already happening now, but one that also continues to happen in the future. So the idea is not so much “get up and go” as it is “as you’re going along in life.”

The great commission is not a verbal command to go.  It is a command to disciple *as* you are already going.

You ask, “going where?” And the answer is: *everywhere*.

That means that the Great Commission is not just about going on trips to evangelize people who speak a different language, even though that is a good thing to do.  The “going” in the great commission is best understood as a fact that is taken for granted.  It would be more like, “While you’re going through your daily routine, you, yes you – you who work there at the school or at the restaurant–as *you* are going along doing what you do, and going wherever *you* go… disciple!”

There’s actually a recognition here that every one of us is, in a sense, in a constant state of making disciples. That is, our lives are always bearing witness to the people around us. The question is: do our lives tell a story about Jesus, or about something else?

What this verse is saying is that we need to be aware of the influence we have on others. We need to think about the example we are setting, the priorities we have in life, the way our choices affect those around us.

The model for discipleship in the time of Jesus was apprenticeship. More than academic instruction, disciples were apprenticed to their masters and did life with them. The 12 apostles didn’t do a course of training with Jesus, they followed him for three years. They ate with him and travelled with him and worked alongside of him. An apprentice learns by listening *and* watching *and* participating, little by little, with more responsibility being earned over time.

The best example of all might be what God designed for the home, where dads and moms teach in word and deed through all areas of life and as they raise their children into adulthood.

Every person can participate in the Great Commission without ever leaving town, because we’re all involved in this idea of “going.”  We are all going through life in the every-day stuff.  We all have a well worn path that we walk every day, and that is the place where we can disciple others.

Next, **Baptizing**. We make disciples by baptizing.

On the one hand, this is easy to understand. Baptism is the initiation ritual into Christianity. As we share the good news of Jesus with people and help them to understand His claim on their life, they mark their acceptance of the gospel by being baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So making disciples means calling people to make decisions for Jesus.

But in addition to initiation into Jesus, baptism also marks initiation into the body of believers. In our church, especially, we talk about baptism as a mark of the covenant community.

And so we can think of the work of discipling as inviting people into the fellowship of the church.

I like what Mark Dever says about how the church is the ideal environment for disciple-making to take place:

Christian discipling isn’t so much the work of experts and technocrats; to borrow the old phrase, it’s the work of one beggar pointing another beggar to bread.

And the local church is the best place for such relationships to grow. A church can be thick with mentoring relationships even if they aren’t formally called “discipling relationships.” After all, discipling really is just a bunch of church members taking responsibility to prepare one another for glory. It’s one way we see the New Testament idea that we are a kingdom of priests and a holy nation ([1 Pet. 2:9](https://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Pet.%202.9)). How much *pastoring* gets done in the ordinary life of a congregation when it’s characterized by a culture of discipling! (<https://www>.thegospelcoalition.org/article/4-ways-to-make-disciples)

So the best environment for making disciples is in the life of a local church.

And then, finally, **teaching.** We make disciples by teaching.

Jesus says, “Go and make disciples…teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”

The idea here is that we are to spend the time necessary with a baptized disciple teaching them obedience to everything Jesus taught.  That has two big ideas.  One – we will have to teach them the things Jesus taught. Two--we will have to teach them to obey Jesus.  The word “teaching” conveys both imparting ideas (conveying theology), and living the things I am teaching (consistent modeling).

At its core, discipling is teaching. We teach with words. We teach all the words Jesus taught his disciples, and all the words of the Bible.

Corporately, this is why our church emphasizes the Sunday morning sermon the way we do. It’s why we put the sermon text on the screen and examine it closely, sometimes right down to the level of whether a word is an imperative or a participle. It’s why we emphasize our children’s ministry and youth ministry. It’s important that we value the Bible as the truth about God and the best way to know Him.

Interpersonally, teaching occurs as we have spiritually meaningful conversations with each other. In small groups, in prayer groups, in the lobby between services, and just moving through life together.

Have spiritually meaningful conversations with each other. It’s fine to talk about football or the kids’ school or the weather. But talk about Sunday’s sermon as well. Ask your friends what God has been teaching them about Himself. Share your challenges, and your joys.

Again, here’s where it is helpful to think about the apprentice model of Jesus’ time: real discipling happens as those who have been walking with the LORD a bit longer provide guidance to those who are younger in the faith. It happens as we take responsibility to prepare one another for glory.

***Conclusion***So, I want you to think about the Great Commission in a new way. We usually think of it as a call to travel overseas as missionaries, to preach the good news of Jesus to those have never heard it. And that is certainly part of it.

But more than that, it is a call to make disciples wherever you are. All authority on heaven and earth has been given to Jesus. He is with you wherever you go. So make disciples for Him. As you go along. In the church. As you model and teach what it means to follow Him.