

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 8/31/14
Matthew 28:18-20 "Our Mission Involves Going"^{**1}
Current Series: "We Have a Mission"

Brad Brandt

Main Idea: If we're going to fulfill the mission Jesus gave us, it involves *going*. As we look carefully at Matthew 28:19-20, we learn three things about going.

- I. We learn that going is a prerequisite.
 - A. It's not the end.
 - B. It's the means to accomplish the end.
- II. We learn that going involves a purpose.
 - A. Our mission is to reproduce.
 1. We must introduce others to Christ.
 2. We must teach others how to follow Christ.
 - B. That's exactly what the early church did.
 1. In Acts we see a growing church.
 2. In Acts we see a going church.
 - ⇒We see the apostles going (5:20).
 - ⇒We see Philip going (8:26, 29).
 - ⇒We see Ananias going (9:11).
 - ⇒We see Peter going (10:20).
 - ⇒We see Paul going (18:6).
- III. We learn that going involves people.
 - A. We're responsible for those near us.
 - B. We're responsible for those far from us.
 1. It costs to go.
 2. In order to go I must say no to self.

The Bottom Line: It boils down to this...

1. If He had not come there would be no reason to go.
2. But He did, and we must!

Suppose there was a factory in town. You watched this factory for a period of months and noticed some things. Day after day you saw workers take materials in the front door--lots of materials--and the workers exerted great effort to get the materials inside.

But you noticed something odd. The shipping dock was empty. Nothing ever went out of that factory. There was no production. So you approached the plant manager and asked the obvious question, "What do you do in there?"

He replied, "Oh, we work."

"Well, I can see that," you returned. "Every day I see lots of people go inside the building, and I see lots of materials taken in the front door. But what do you make?"

To which the plant manager said, "Oh, our people get together so we can see each other. And we work together. We work real hard."

At this point you're finding it hard to hide your frustration, "I don't question that you work hard. I'm just wondering what you make."

Immediately the manager speaks up, "Oh, you want to know what we *make*. Well, that depends. You see, we let each worker decide what he wants to make each day. We find that makes for better morale on the team. Well, I've gotta go. I've got to get back to work. It's been nice talking with you."

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For an earlier development of this text and theme, see the series at WBC which began 11/21/99.

As he walks away, you scratch your head and can't help but notice the cobwebs hanging across the shipping dock.²

How'd you like to work in that factory? A factory that doesn't understand it's mission isn't going to be around long, is it?

Last week we began an important series as a church called, "We Have a Mission." The truth is, there's no question as to why we exist as a church. Our Savior gave us a mission. He told us to *make* something. And He told us how to do it, too.

Just before returning to heaven Jesus spelled out the mission for His followers in Matthew 28:18-20, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

What are churches supposed to make? Disciples. And how do you make disciples? The three participles in the mission statement address the question *how*. It involves going, baptizing, and teaching.

I've entitled this message, "Our Mission Involves *Going*." The truth is, going is not natural. Staying is natural. Or straying is natural. But strategic and intentional moving from where we are to a destination determined by another is not natural.

But it is God's way. It's how He has purposed to rescue sinners and transform them into trophies of His grace all over the planet.

His mission involves *going*. He left heaven and came to earth. And our mission involves going. If we're to fulfill the task Christ gave to us, we must *go*.

In the year 1800³, 99% of the world's Christians lived in Europe and North America. In 1900, 90% lived in Europe and North America. In 1979 it was 50%. As of 2011 it is 26%. That means that 74% of the world's Christians now live in what's called the "Global South." The "center" of Christianity has moved out of Europe and North America and rests in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

How did that happen? Ultimately, of course, it's because of sovereign working of the Spirit of God in the world. But because God works through people, at least most of the time, there's a human element to the answer. Christianity has spread to the global south because Jesus says our mission involves going, and our forefathers in Europe and North America embraced that mission.

Brothers and sisters, I want to share some news with you that you may not know. According to the Joshua Project again, every day approximately 40,000 people across the globe come to faith in Christ. An average of 3,500 new churches open every week around the world.

Why is this happening? Because the Spirit of God is working, and our brothers and sisters are going.

"In the last ten years," says one agency, "more Muslims have come to faith in Christ in the Middle East than in the past 15 centuries of Islam.

Here are some specific examples:

² I'm not sure of the source of this illustration, but I believe I first ran across it in one of Bill Hull's books (possibly *The Disciple-Making Pastor*).

³ According to The Joshua Project. See joshuaproject.net.

-Iran: It is estimated that more Iranians have become followers of Jesus Christ in the last 31 years than the past 1400 years combined. It is estimated that more than 3,000 Iranians are putting their faith in Jesus Christ each month.

-Iraq: During Saddam Hussein's rule, there were only a few hundred known Evangelicals in Iraq; now there are an estimated 53,000 in the country.

-Afghanistan: There were only 17 known Muslim background followers of Christ before 9/11/01. Today there are more than 10,000.

-Israel: More Jews have embraced Jesus / Yeshua as Messiah since 1967 when the Jews took control of Jerusalem than in all the years between 100 AD and 1967.

-Nepal: In the early 1980s there were only 75 known Nepali believers. Today there are an estimated 850,000 believers. From almost no churches 20 years ago to nearly 10,000 churches and house fellowships today.

-In Uganda: One church in Kampala seats 10,500 and is filled to capacity for four services every Sunday. The church has planted more than 1,000 daughter churches across Uganda and has sent missionaries to South America, Japan and the United States.

-China: In 1950, when China closed to missionaries, there were about one million Chinese believers. Today some estimate over 75 million believers and over 10,000 new Christians in China every day! There are more followers of Christ in China than in North America.

We have reason to celebrate! Our Savior is doing amazing things around the world to reach His people. But the work isn't done. Our mission still involves *going* because there are still people and people groups to be reached.

I shared the gospel with someone this week who responded by saying, "I've never heard that." That's right here in Wheelersburg. People all around us don't know about redemption Jesus provided on the cross. And certainly that's the case around the world.

Today the percentage of people who have never heard the gospel is down from 75% in 1800 to 28%, certainly wonderful progress. But 28% means that almost two billion people have not heard the Gospel message even one time!

So our mission which involves going remains. But that raises some questions. Go where? Who is to go? What specifically are we trying to accomplish as we go? We're going to find the answers to those questions by examining Jesus' words in Matthew 28:19 carefully, and as we do we'll learn three important things about going.

I. We learn that going is a prerequisite.

Our mission states, "Go and make disciples (19)." A prerequisite is by definition "something required beforehand." What is the requirement which must be met if we're going to make disciples? Jesus said we must *go*. We will not accomplish our mission if we fail to go.

Having said that, when it comes to going, we need to keep in mind a couple of things.

A. It's not the end. I remind you that in the Greek text the word "go" is a participle. Literally it reads, "as you are *going*." Jesus assumes that His disciples will be going. In fact, grammatically, when a Greek participle is followed by a command, it often receives the force of the command. So it's not inappropriate to translate the word as a command, "Go," as long as we keep this in mind. Going isn't the end. Rather...

B. It's the means to accomplish the end. Our mission is clear. The Lord commands us to make disciples. That's the essence of our mission. That's the *end*. But it starts with going. Going is the essential first step in the fulfillment of our mission. In reality...

1. *There will be no impact without contact.* Or to put it another way...

2. *We'll never make disciples if we don't go.* The first responsibility for disciple-makers is to go. Jesus told His followers to do with others what He had done with them. We're not to keep to ourselves what we've received. We're to pass it on to others. That necessitates going.

I would not be a disciple of Jesus Christ today if someone had not reached out to me. Nor would you. It's not complicated. Jesus said that if we are His disciples, we must go.

Brothers and sisters, we exist because others have gone. It started right after Jesus returned to heaven. One day some angry men arrested two of our forefathers. They were threatened and warned to stop telling people about Jesus. Their response? "We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard (Acts 4:20)."

Peter and John got it, didn't they? Going is a prerequisite. The Lord Jesus Christ gave us a responsibility. We are His representatives, His servants, His ambassadors. He commissioned us to be fishers of men, to draw in the nets, to make disciples. And if that's to happen, we must *go*.

But not just go. This leads to the questions, go where, and go why? According to Jesus' instruction we learn a second insight about going in verse 19.

II. We learn that going involves a purpose.

In fact, a clearly stated purpose--"In your going, make disciples of all nations." There's our purpose, to make disciples of Jesus Christ. A disciple, by definition, is "a taught or trained one; a follower." That's what we've been sent to make.

I would remind you of what Jesus told His disciples when He called them. In Matthew 4:19 He said, "Follow me and I will *make* you fishers of men." Now compare that to His commission here, "Go and *make* disciples."

To put it succinctly...

A. Our mission is to reproduce. As a church we are in the disciple-making business. As the founder of the Navigators ministry, Dawson Trotman, used to say, "Activity is no substitute for production. Production is no substitute for reproduction."

Our purpose is to reproduce ourselves, to make disciples of Jesus Christ. Jesus said in John 15:16, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit--fruit that will last." Earlier in John 15:8 Jesus put it this way, "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."

What's the evidence of a true disciple? Fruit bearing. A genuine disciple is a reproducing disciple.

Suppose you were my neighbor and one day you asked me, "What kind of tree is that in your yard?" And I responded, "Why, it's an apple tree, of course." To which you replied, "Hold on, Brad. I've been your neighbor for ten years. Are you sure that's an apple tree? Maybe it is, but I've never seen a single apple on that tree. Aren't apple trees supposed to produce apples?"

And that would be a legitimate question. So is this. What are disciples of Christ supposed to be doing? Producing something, right? Specifically, according to Jesus, other disciples of Christ.

So a fruitless disciple is a contradiction in terms. Again, to coin a phrase by Dawson Trotman, we were born to reproduce. Apple trees reproduce apples--not pears or plums but apples. Disciples reproduce disciples--not just church activity, and not even church attenders, but growing in Christ *disciples* who are also making disciples of others.

What does it take to be a reproducing disciple? For starters, only life can produce life. That means if I'm not connected to the Vine, I can't produce the fruit. If I don't know Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior, I can't be a disciple-maker.

But if we do know Him, our mission is reproduction, to make other disciples. How does that happen? It's not complicated. We have two basic responsibilities.

1. *We must introduce others to Christ.* But we mustn't stop there. Secondly...

2. *We must teach others how to follow Christ.* That's our mission, nothing less.

Not just live a godly life, as important as that is. Not just invite people to come to church, as important as that is too. Not just tell people about Christ, as vital as that is. Our mission is to introduce people to Christ and teach them how to follow Him. To *make disciples*. That's our purpose.

And when we read the New Testament we quickly discover...

B. That's exactly what the early church did. In God's plan He preserved for us in His Word a historical account of the first thirty years of the church's history. It's recorded in living color in the book of Acts. Acts tells us the story of the early church. As we read Acts we can't help but notice two characteristics of the early church.

1. *In Acts we see a growing church.* Let's do a quick case study to see what happened. In A.D. 30, Jesus Christ died, rose again, gave the mission we're studying to His disciples, and ascended to heaven with a promise He would return. How many disciples did He leave behind? According to Acts 1:15, the group in Jerusalem numbered about a hundred and twenty. Then came Pentecost and Peter's sermon in Acts 2. As a result 3,000 were added to the church (2:41). And that was just the beginning.

In Acts 4:4 the number grew to about 5,000--and that was in Jerusalem. In time, the church expanded to Samaria (ch 8) and then northward to the Gentile city of Antioch (ch 11). After awhile the Spirit of God prompted the church in Antioch to say, "This is too good to keep to ourselves. Let's send some of our best leaders to take the gospel to other cities and other lands." And so, the first team of missionaries was sent out (Acts 13).

As a result the church spread throughout the Roman Empire. Local churches were established in Cyprus, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe (ch 14). Then the missionary efforts turned to the large, urban centers of the world, and large cities were impacted with the gospel--like Philippi (ch 16), Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens (ch 17), Corinth (ch 18), and Ephesus (ch 19).

My point is not to give a history lesson. It's to illustrate a key characteristic of the early church. In Acts we see a *growing* church.

The question becomes, "Why? Why did the church grow?" From the divine perspective the answer is God's sovereignty. God has chosen a people that He will bring to Himself. That's why a text like Acts 13:48 explains church growth in terms like these:

"When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed."

Jesus said that *He* would build His church. And He will. But how does He do it? He does it *through* people who take the mission He gave them seriously. And that's the second characteristic of the church that jumps off the page in Acts.

2. *In Acts we see a going church.* I encourage you to trace the word "go" through Acts some time. Here's a sampling of what you'll find.

⇒ We see the apostles going (5:20). The apostles had been arrested for preaching the gospel, but that very night an angel opened the jail door and gave them this charge, "*Go*, stand in the temple courts and tell the people the full message of this new life." The message was *go*, and they went. They were rearrested, flogged, and told, "Don't go!" by the leaders, but still they went taking the gospel to the Jews.

⇒ We see Philip going (8:26, 29). An angel told Philip (26), "*Go* south along the road--the desert road--that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." So Philip went and on the way he saw an Ethiopian official reading in his chariot. The Spirit told Philip (29), "*Go* to that chariot and stay near it." And you know the rest of the story. Philip introduced that man to Jesus Christ.

⇒ We see Ananias going (9:11). Ananias was a disciple who lived in Damascus. One day the Lord called to him in a vision and told him, "*Go* to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul." And Ananias went and took the Word of God to Saul.

⇒ We see Peter going (10:20). One day the Spirit said these words to Peter who was on a friend's roof at the time, "So get up and *go* downstairs. Do not hesitate to *go* with them, for I have sent them." So Peter obeyed and took the gospel to a man named Cornelius, and the mission of the church turned to the Gentiles.

⇒ We see Paul going (18:6). In Acts 18 Paul faced abusive opposition from the Jews he was evangelizing, so he said this, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am clear of my responsibility. From now on I will *go* to the Gentiles."

I'm amazed as I ponder this evidence. Yes, the early church was a growing church, but why? It was a *going* church. The heart-throbbing ambition of the followers of Christ in Acts was to know Christ and make Christ known to others. So they went!

In Acts we see the Holy Spirit leading the people of Christ to *go*. We see people who were available and willing to get involved in the lives of others. We see ordinary people--just like us--who were on the *go*, making disciples. They were gripped with a sense of purpose.

The church was *going* somewhere. It was on the move. It was not static, ingrown, or self-focused. It understood its mission. Which brings us to insight #3.

III. We learn that going involves people.

Answer this. Where are we supposed to go? What's the target we're supposed to hit when it comes to making disciples? Jesus told us in plain terms, "Go and make disciples of *all nations*." Go to the *ethna* (that's the Greek term for "Gentiles").

Remember, the men who first received this charge were Jews. Quite likely, they'd lived all their lives in Israel. And now they hear their Master say, "Go make disciples of all nations." This was not a Jewish mission. This was a worldwide mission.

Let that sink in, fellow disciples of Christ. Our commission from Jesus crosses all ethnic barriers, all social divisions, all economic classes. Going involves people, *all* the people groups of the world.

In his book *The Lost Art of Disciple Making* Leroy Eims had this to say, "What then is the problem today? Why don't we see more of this going on? Why are fruitful, dedicated, mature disciples so rare? The biggest reason is that all too often we have relied on programs or materials to do the job. The ministry is to be carried on by people, not programs. It is to be carried out by some *one* not by some *thing*. Disciples cannot be mass produced."

He's right. Going involves *people*. So let's break it down. Who are the people for whom we are responsible in our mission? If we're going to make disciples of *all nations*, simply put, we need to consider two groups.

A. We're responsible for those near us. Did Jesus tell our unsaved neighbors to come to us? No. According to our mission, we are to go to them.

Do you have a list of people that you are praying for and actively seeking to introduce to Christ? People at work, at school, your neighbors, the person who cuts your hair, or sells your cup of coffee on your way to work? There are people all around us who do not know our Savior and therefore are not His disciples.

Go, make disciples, said the Master.

To help you, you're going to receive a card today letting you know about a free app called Bible.is. That app makes the Bible available in over 800 languages. Many are audio so you can listen (some are dramatized). I urge you to take several cards and give them to people you know who speak other languages. Let them hear the Bible in their heart language.

If we're going to make disciples we need to start with those near us. But we mustn't stop there. According to our mission...

B. We're responsible for those far from us. Remember the target? Jesus said it's *all nations*. Yes, we're to go across the street and tell our neighbors about Jesus. That's called evangelism. But we're also responsible to make disciples around the world. That's called missions.

According to the Joshua Project there are over 6,900 people groups still considered unreached in the world. Those people groups make up more than 2 billion people who do not know Jesus and most have never even heard of Him.

Here's an illustration from The Joshua Project. If we used 10 people to represent the world's population, the state of Christianity would look like this:

Jesus? He is my Lord and Savior. ONE person out of ten would be a true follower of Jesus (10%).

Jesus? He is a nice teacher, but I want to do my own thing. TWO people out of ten might call themselves Christians, but their obedience to Jesus is doubtful (20%).

Jesus? No thank you. FOUR people out of ten have some access to the gospel, but they have not yet responded (40%).

Jesus? Who is that? The last THREE people have virtually no access to the gospel (30%).

There are over one billion people in the world who are Buddhist or who practice Chinese traditional religion. There are 1.6 billion Muslims (25% of the world's

population). There are 950 million Hindus, largely in India (14% of the world). There are 230 million people who identify themselves as atheists.⁴

The point is this. There are people far from us who don't know the life-changing person of Jesus Christ. They don't know the bad news nor the good news. The bad news--as sinners they are under the wrath of a holy God. The good news--Jesus Christ endured that wrath in the place of sinners while on the cross. Today God offers forgiveness and eternal life to all who will believe in His risen Son.

We know that. But there are millions of people who do not. Some are near us, but most are far from us. So what are we to think about this reality? Our mission says we have a responsibility.

In your going make disciples of all nations.

How are we going to do that? It starts with prayer. "Lord, help us to see the world the way You see it, including the woman I see across the street every day *and* the untold billions I've never seen around the globe. Help us to see them."

Then another prayer. "Lord, please send workers into the harvest, to make disciples of those on the other side of town *and* the other side of the world."

We have a tremendous opportunity before us. Right now about one-fourth of our budget is going to missions. That's encouraging, but the opportunities for more stand before us. I'd like for us to pray as a church about taking on additional missionaries, particularly to reach the unreached people groups in the world.

Less than 2% of all missions giving in the world is directed toward the 10/40 Window. Yet "dollar for dollar and hour for hour, the harvest coming from the 10/40 Window nations outstrips that from the rest of the world 100 to 1." The top 10 countries with the largest "unevangelized population" are located in the 10/40 Window.⁵

But the need certainly isn't just for missionary money. The Lord Jesus said, "Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest field." Let's ask God to call new missionaries from His church, including ours, people who will say, "Lord, I'll go. I'll invest my life in making disciples wherever You want me to go."

But wait. A person should't be sent around the world if he's not willing first to go across the street. Missions begins with our mission here. So let's pray for an increased interest in evangelism and disciple-making in our community. Let's not just do church. Let's embrace the mission of the church.

Granted, we're not all gifted the same way. But we can, indeed, the Lord calls all of us to use what He has given us to accomplish this mission. *Make disciples of all the people groups, starting at home.*

You say, "That's sort of an intimidating challenge." Perhaps. But think of what Jesus' words sounded like to the men who first heard the charge, "Go and make disciples of all nations."

Remember, Jesus originally gave this mission statement to eleven very ordinary men (28:16). What did those eleven men do with the mission their Master gave them? The short answer is this. They *went*. First to their city, then their homeland, and then beyond.

⁴Bryant L. Myers, *The New Context of World Mission*, p. 16. Some figures updated in 2014 by google.

⁵ According to The Joshua Project

Listen to their stories. Peter spent several years making disciples in Jerusalem. Later in his life he went to Rome in fulfillment of the mission, where (according to tradition) he was crucified for his faith.

Andrew made disciples in Israel for awhile. Later, according to the church historian Eusebius, he went to Scythia, an area which is between the Black and Caspian Sea. Tradition says he was martyred by crucifixion in Greece.

James the son of Zebedee made disciples for about a dozen years while serving in Jerusalem. He was then arrested and beheaded by Herod Agrippa (between A.D. 42-44).

His brother, John, served in Jerusalem for several years. Later because of persecution and ministry opportunity he went to Ephesus. He spent time in exile on the island of Patmos until he was released. Most feel John was the only person of the eleven who did not die a martyr's death.

Philip eventually left his homeland and preached in Asia Minor. One tradition says he was crucified under the emperor Domitian.

Nathanael took the gospel either to Ethiopia or Arabia. Thomas went to India and was speared near Madras in A.D. 72. Matthew made disciples in Judea, and then is said to have evangelized the nations of the east. James the son of Alpheus apparently ministered in Israel until he was put to death just shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. We don't know much about Simon, but according to various traditions, he either went to Edessa or Persia. Jude Thaddeus eventually preached in Mesopotamia, then possibly joined the apostle Simon in Persia where they worked together making disciples until they were both martyred.⁶

Dear friends, our forefathers were serious about the mission the Master gave them. The question is, are we? If we are, please be aware of a couple of practical implications.

1. *It costs to go.* Time. Money. Energy. Your life. Bill Hull hits the nail on the head when he says, "Many Christians think of themselves as an audience to be entertained rather than an army ready to march."⁷ Yes, it costs to go. That means, secondly...

2. *In order to go I must say no to self.* I must be willing to follow the Lord wherever He leads. You see, whether I go to the next house or the next country I must be willing to leave the security and familiarity of my home.

So my friend, it's time to go. It's been time to go ever since the Lord delivered this mission to our forefathers two thousand years ago.

The Bottom Line: It boils down to this...

1. *If He had not come there would be no reason to go.*

2. *But He did, and we must!*

This week David Platt, author of *Radical*, a book we read together as a church a couple of years ago, resigned from pastoring a church he loved in Alabama to become the president of the International Mission Board. I want you to hear his testimony as to why he's going, and ponder your own life, as he talks about the importance of being "a blank check" in God's hands.

⁶from *Jesus and the Twelve*, Good Will Publishers, 1969.

⁷Bill Hull, *Jesus Christ Disciple Maker*.