

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 8/24/14
Matthew 28:18-20 “Our Mission Is to Make Disciples**¹
Current Series: “*We Have a Mission*”

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Main Idea: There are two things Jesus makes clear about our mission in Matthew 28:18-20.

- I. Jesus reveals the potential (18, 20).
 - A. We can fulfill our mission because we have Jesus' authority (18).
 - B. We can fulfill our mission because because we have Jesus' presence (20b).
 1. Without it we could do nothing.
 2. With it we can proceed with confidence.
- II. Jesus reveals the plan (19-20a).
 - A. Jesus told us what to do.
 1. He didn't tell us to change the world.
 2. He didn't tell us to get decisions.
 3. He told us to make disciples.
 4. In essence, He told us to do what He did.
 - B. Jesus told us how to do it.
 1. Making disciples involves going.
 2. Making disciples involves baptizing.
 3. Making disciples involves teaching.

Implications: Because we take our mission seriously...

1. Missions is important to us, locally and worldwide.
2. Our community center ministry is important to us.
3. Our biblical counseling ministry is important to us.
4. Our body life is important to us.
5. Our attention to sound doctrine is important to us.
6. Our willingness to launch new ministries is important to us.

God sent His Son to planet earth on a mission, to rescue a people. Matthew presents Him as *the King*. We meet the King in the first chapters of Matthew's gospel. We hear His kingdom address in chapters 5-7. We see His kingly authority in action in His miracles in chapters 8 and following. We also see the King offer Himself to His people, the Jews, in chapter 21, but they rejected Him, as He knew they would. And through their rejection, He died on a cross in chapter 27, providing a ransom for sinners, and then conquered death in chapter 28.

But before He returned to heaven, King Jesus, who announced He's coming back, met with His disciples at the end of chapter 28, and gave them a mission. It's our mission, and today I want to launch a series to ponder it carefully.

Yet before we go any further, let's talk about *why*. Why talk about our mission?

Wheelersburg Baptist Church has been in existence since the Lord established it in April 1878. That's over 136 years. Sherry and I have had the God-given joy to belong to this church for the past 27 years. For some of you, it's longer. For many, it's shorter.

I'd like to see a show of hands. How many of you have been part of WBC more than 10 years, that's before 2004? How many over 20 years, that's before 1994? Over 30 years, that's 1984?

Now, how many have started coming in the past 10 years? The past 5 years?

Praise God, we have a wonderful mixture in terms of longevity! And this mixture creates a dynamic that's healthy and at times a little challenging.

**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 11/14/99.

Why challenging? I recently listened to Albert Mohler's audio book, *The Conviction to Lead*. I want to keep growing to be a more Christlike leader, and I found this book quite helpful. One paragraph in particular really got my attention. Let me read it for you: How can leadership happen if the people in an organization aren't trying to move in the same direction? That is a greater challenge than you may think. *We often just assume that people working in an organization share common goals, but leaders know not to take this for granted.* Common goals are the product of intensive communication, enduring influence, and constant affirmation. People who start out with a common set of goals may drift apart, pushed and pulled by all sorts of events, opportunities, and challenges. Healthy organizations are constantly bringing new people into their workforce. These new people will not embrace common goals by accident. There must be a structure in place to inculcate, define, and affirm these goals throughout the organization [italics added].²

Listen to that sentence again. *We often just assume that people working in an organization share common goals, but leaders know not to take this for granted.*

That's what this series is all about. It's called, "*We Have a Mission.*" We've talked about it before, many times in fact, but as we've just seen, because of how the Lord is graciously adding to this church many weren't here for those messages. And even if we were, those with a common set of goals (to borrow from Mohler again) "may drift apart, pushed and pulled by all sorts of events."

Successful organizations know their mission. I think about *The Union Mission* in Charleston, WV. I love their website, *wefeedpeople.com*. There's no question about why they exist.

Coca-Cola has an intriguing mission statement: "To refresh the world, to inspire moments of optimism and happiness, to create value and make a difference." Interesting. It doesn't even say anything about selling sugar water for a profit. That's not inspiring. But this is. *To refresh the world!*

I scanned through some Fortune 500 mission statements.³

Here's Nike's: "To bring inspiration and innovation to every athlete in the world."

CVS has an interesting one: "We will be the easiest pharmacy retailer for customers to use."

So does CSX: "To be the safest, most progressive North American railroad, relentless in the pursuit of customer and employee excellence."

So what is our mission as a church? Why is WBC here?

The truth is, every person in this room has notions about that question. It's how you finish the sentence, "I think WBC should..."

How would you finish that sentence? Preach the Word of God? Offer quality programs for families? Meet the needs of hurting people?

Thankfully, Jesus Himself answered the question for us. Before the Savior left His small band of disciples two thousand years ago, He gave them an assignment to accomplish before He returned for them. An agenda. *A mission.*

² Albert Mohler, *The Conviction to Lead*, p. 118.

³ http://www.missionstatements.com/fortune_500_mission_statements.html

Please realize that our mission has not changed. That being the case we must constantly go back and reaffirm it and reevaluate our efforts by it. That's why I'm excited to introduce today our series, "We Have a Mission," and then discuss it's implications together in our care groups.

Jesus actually stated the mission in various ways...

John 20:21 -- "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."

Mark 16:15-16 -- "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."

Luke 24:47-48 -- "Repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things."

Acts 1:8 -- "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

We could summarize these four versions of the Great Commission like this: "Go and preach the gospel all over the world to every person. Go in the power of the Holy Spirit. Go tell people what you have witnessed. Start at home, and keep going until the whole world has heard the good news about Jesus."

But there's a problem, as author Bill Hull points out in his book *The Disciple Making Pastor*. That would be like getting a bunch of novice contractors together and telling them: "Go build houses. Make them special, award-winning houses. Here is the money. Build them all over the world."

What's the problem? What's missing? The contractors don't know enough about the houses. What kind of houses are they to build? They need direction. They need a punchlist for building their houses. They need a *blueprint*.

That's what we need, too. And that's what Jesus gave us. He gave us the blueprint, the methodology. He told us *how* to fulfill our mission. Where? In Matthew 28:18-20.

You might think of Matthew 28:18-20 as a *missions* text, but initially it's a *mission* text. In these three verses Jesus tells every Christian what He expects him to be and do. So if you are a follower of Christ, this is for you, *your* God-given mission.

I'm convinced that we will not be effective for Christ if we are not clear about our mission. So I want to work through these three verses word by word, to allow Jesus' instruction to evaluate us, shake and redirect us if needed, and motivate us as we move into the future as a church.

It's true. If we are even slightly confused about our mission, it will show up in a big way. Maybe not today. But in five years, for sure. And in ten years? If we abandon our mission, we won't even resemble a New Testament church.

On the other hand, the fruit comes, and the joy with it, when we together embrace the mission Jesus gave us. So let's dig in!

Listen to Jesus' commission 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."

There it is. There are two things Jesus makes clear about our mission in Matthew 28:18-20. He reveals the potential and the plan. We'll spend most of our time looking at the plan itself today and in future weeks. But to get started, let's notice how Jesus couched the plan between two verses that underscore the potential.

I. Jesus reveals the potential (18, 20).

Experts tell us that one billion people on this planet have never heard the gospel. According to the Joshua Project, there are presently 4,080 unreached people groups in the world (out of 9,751).⁴ In our area, less than one out of three people are connected with a church, far less than that meaningfully. So the potential is certainly great.

But in this mission text Jesus talks about potential from a different perspective. What is it that makes the fulfillment of our mission possible? According to Jesus, two realities. In fact, were it not for these realities we might be overwhelmed by the enormity of the task.

A. We can fulfill our mission because we have Jesus' authority (18).

Notice the context. Verse 18 begins, "Then Jesus came to them." Who is *them*? According to verse 16, Jesus is meeting with His eleven disciples--remember Judas is gone. These men who deserted Jesus when He was arrested have now been restored. Jesus is about to return to heaven, but before He does He schedules a meeting with His disciples on a mountain in Galilee.

How did they respond when they saw Him? They worshiped Him, but some doubted (17). *Then*, as the text reads, at that point, Jesus said these words to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."

You have to have authority to accomplish a mission. You need the where-with-all. Notice two insights concerning Jesus' authority.

1. *Jesus received authority from the Father.* He says it was "given" to Him. From whom? From His heavenly Father. To do what? To fulfill the plan given to Him by His Father, namely to redeem a people. John 3:35 states, "The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands." So Jesus derived authority from His Father.

What did He do with that authority? Insight #2...

2. *Jesus delivered authority to His disciples.* He gave them a command in verse 19, a mission, which we'll examine in a moment. For now it's vital to see this. We have the potential to do what we've been commanded to do. Through Jesus. That means no excuses are acceptable. Our mission is possible because we have King Jesus' authority.

B. We can fulfill our mission because because we have Jesus' presence (20b).

Notice Jesus' final words in verse 20, "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." He'd been with the disciples for three years, but now He was leaving. And just prior to leaving He said, "I am with you always." How can Jesus both leave and remain? The answer is given in Acts 2, isn't it? He sent His Spirit to indwell His people.

Fellow disciples, R. T. France is right (416), "The promise of God's presence...is not so much a cozy reassurance as a necessary equipment for mission." In other words, it's not just *nice* to know we have Jesus' presence. It's *essential* to know. Why? Because...

⁴ http://joshuaproject.net/global_statistics

1. *Without it we could do nothing.* Absolutely nothing. We could not fulfill our mission, let alone do anything of eternal significance apart from Jesus' presence. But consider the flipside...

2. *With it we can proceed with confidence.* He gave us a promise, "I am with you always." Those are hope-giving words! This is what makes our mission possible. We have Jesus' presence.

If you're thinking, "I'm too shy. I can't tell people about Jesus. I don't have what it takes. I'm just an ordinary person, not a preacher." Beloved, Jesus gave this mission to a bunch of ordinary, blue-collar-type men who turned the world upside down. They didn't succeed at their mission because they were such exceptional people, nor will we.

What makes our mission possible is this. We have the King's authority and the King's presence. When it comes to our mission, there's the potential. Secondly...

II. Jesus reveals the plan (19-20a).

What's the plan? Here it is, "Therefore [in light of the potential] 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."

There's the plan. There's the blueprint Jesus expected us to follow in fulfilling the great commission. It's very practical. Notice two things about this plan.

A. Jesus told us what to do. In fact, the grammatical structure of Jesus' instruction in verse 19 is very precise. There is one main verb, and there are three supporting participles. The participles will answer the question *how*, but the main verb addresses the issue of *what*. The main verb is the bull's eye of our mission.

So what's the main verb? In the Greek text it's *matheteusate*. In the KJV it appears as "teach." In the NIV it's translated "make disciples."

That's it. That's our mission. We who are disciples of Jesus Christ are to make disciples. Jesus gave us one, fundamental, basic, absolutely vital responsibility.

Stop there. Before we delve into what our mission *is*, let's consider what it is *not*. Please realize what Jesus did *not* tell us to do.

1. *He didn't tell us to change the world.* That's not our mission. Should we care about our world? Should we care about the turmoil in Ferguson, and Gaza, and Iraq? Certainly. I am my brother's keeper. But my mission isn't to turn the world into a God-pleasing place to live. My mission is much more specific than that.

2. *He didn't tell us to get decisions.* As in getting people to make the decision to become a Christian. Now granted, becoming a disciple involves a decision, but that's just the beginning. Jesus didn't say, "Go make converts," or even "Go, make Christians." What did He say?

3. *He told us to make disciples.* A disciple, by definition, is a "taught or trained one," a "pupil or follower." The noun appears 269 times in the New Testament (mostly in the gospels and Acts). A disciple is a person who hears, understands, and obeys the Master. That's the mission. Go make disciples. Devote the rest of your life to disciple-making.

Perhaps you're thinking, "What exactly does disciple-making look like? Can you give me a picture of a disciple-maker in action?" The answer is *yes*. It just so happens that I have a book that contains a portrait of the greatest disciple-maker the world has ever seen.

You have that book, too. It's called the Bible, and that disciple-maker, of course, was Jesus Himself.

The eleven men who first received this mission statement knew what a disciple was. It's what they were. And they knew what a disciple-maker was, for they had been disciplined by Jesus. So when they heard Jesus say, "Make disciples," they knew what He meant. He had already *shown* them what He meant. He wanted them to do with others what He had done with them.

So let's personalize this. What is our mission plan?

4. *In essence, Jesus told us to do what He did.* One of the most life-shaping books I've ever read is a small work by Robert Coleman entitled, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*. I urge you to read it, if you haven't, and reread it if you have.

In it Coleman shares how that early in his Christian life he wrestled with the proper strategy to use in evangelism. There certainly are plenty from which to choose. Mass crusades, bus ministries, door to door canvassing, and on and on. To find the method of evangelism approved by God, Coleman decided to engage in a study of the Master Himself, Jesus Christ. What strategy did Jesus use in evangelism?

You may be surprised at what Coleman found as he studied the gospels to observe the *Master Plan of Evangelism*. Here is what Coleman discovered:

It all started by Jesus calling a few men to follow Him. This revealed immediately the direction His evangelistic strategy would take. His concern was not with programs to reach the multitudes, but with men whom the multitudes would follow. Remarkable as it may seem, Jesus started to gather these men before He ever organized an evangelistic campaign or even preached a sermon in public. Men were to be His method of winning the world to God.

The plan is clear. Jesus told us what to do. We are to make disciples. Of whom? He said, "Make disciples *of all nations* [the Greek term is *ethna*]."

Don't miss that. It's not just Israel any longer as it had been during Jesus' ministry. The scope of the church's mission is the world. *Every* nation. *Every* people group. It took the early church about ten years to reach out beyond the Jewish nation to the Gentile world.

And that's our mission, to go across the street and around the world to make disciples of Jesus. We're to do what Jesus did.

You say, "How do you do that?" We can be thankful that in His plan Jesus told us not only what to do but also...

B. Jesus told us how to do it. Remember the three participles? They modify the main verb. They give us the divine plan for how to make disciples. Making disciples involves three activities.

1. *Making disciples involves going.* There is no impact without contact. In order to make a disciple, we must first *go*.

2. *Making disciples involves baptizing.* When we baptize someone, we are helping them identify with Christ and His church *publicly*. What began in the heart is now made known through baptism.

3. *Making disciples involves teaching.* Making disciples involves leading people to Christ and then teaching people to obey Christ. And of course, a person can't obey what they don't know. Hence, the teaching.

In the upcoming weeks we'll put these three activities under the microscope and ponder their significance for fulfilling our mission. This is what it will take if we are going to make disciples: going, baptizing, and teaching.

That's the plan. Jesus told us what to do and how to do it.

Brothers and sisters, it's not that complicated. Disciple-making is showing someone else how to be a fruitful follower of Christ.

Remember how Jesus did it? One day He was walking beside the Sea of Galilee and saw two brothers fishing. He approached Simon and Andrew and said this (Matt 4:19), "Come, follow me."

Those words are critical. Follow Me. You become a disciple by putting your faith and trust in the person you are following. Jesus Christ came to rescue sinners. To be saved, you must believe in Him, and accept the merit of what He did in His crucifixion and resurrection. It was for you, for your salvation.

But the One in whom you believe calls you to *follow* Him. And then to help others do the same, believe and follow Him.

Jesus started, in essence, with twelve men. He discipled them. How? By spending three years with them—eating with them, traveling with them, opening up His life to them, teaching them the Scriptures and how He had come to fulfill them.

Just think about that dynamic. It takes time to make a disciple of Jesus Christ. When we read the four gospels we discover that Jesus invested His life, not haphazardly into the masses, but strategically into twelve men. More than once He took them with Him on a retreat to some mountainous area. Sometimes it was to avoid the hostility of the Pharisees. But primarily it was so He could be alone with them and build into their lives.

They took trips to Tyre and Sidon (Mark 7:24). They went to the borders of the Decapolis (Mark 7:31). Later He spent several months with His disciples in Perea, east of the Jordan (Luke 13:22-19:28). It's not surprising that in the final Passion week, Jesus scarcely ever let His disciples out of His sight.

Jesus practiced the principle of association. He purposefully devoted His life to the twelve. While the Savior didn't neglect the masses, He concentrated His ministry primarily on a select few. He made *disciples*.

And then told those disciples to go make other disciples.

Now here's the million dollar question. Is that happening in most churches today? In some places, yes, but not in most. The pressure today is to get instant results. People want to see numbers and crowds, and there are programs that will quickly do just that.

But is that our mission? Beloved, our mission is to make disciples. And if something doesn't contribute to our mission, good as it may be, it shouldn't get our attention.

Here's the challenge for us as a church. To say no to things that don't contribute to the mission, and invest our time and money and focus into those things that do.

Now let's talk implications. What does all this mean for us as a church?

Implications: Because we take our mission seriously...

We have some ministry distinctives as a church. Things that are vital to us. It's not just just haphazard. They're part of our DNA. Six things. Because we take our mission seriously, first of all...

1. *Missions is important to us, locally and worldwide.* We give about a quarter of every dollar we take in to missions. Why? Because of our mission. We can't keep to ourself what the Lord has given us. We pray that God will send laborers from us to other places? Why? Because of our mission.

2. *Our community center ministry is important to us.* Why did we buy a building across the street last year, and launch a new community center ministry to show this community we care about it? Because that's our mission, to show we care, and then share why we care, the gospel, so we can introduce people to Jesus and then teach them how to follow Him.

3. *Our biblical counseling ministry is important to us.* What is biblical counseling? It's helping hurting people discover biblical answers for their problems. It's targeted discipleship. It's what our mission calls for.

4. *Our body life is important to us.* We have a high view of church membership at WBC. Church isn't a club. It's a family we're devoted to, a body we're connected to. It's where we grow as a disciple. It's where we disciple others. That's why we have deacon care groups, and Sunday School classes, and Growth Groups, and much more. Those aren't programs to us. Those are strategic ministries to help us fulfill our mission.

Fifthly, because we take our mission seriously...

5. *Our attention to sound doctrine is important to us.* "Teaching them to obey whatever I have commanded you." That's what Jesus said. If we lose what He said, we can't fulfill our mission. That's why we do so much teaching of God's Word around here. It's also why we emphasize doctrine and theology. Our mission depends on it.

And sixthly, because we take our mission seriously...

6. *Our willingness to launch new ministries is important to us.* Our mission doesn't change, but our methods do at times. Facebook. Twitter. Skype. Unheard of just a few years ago. But now, new tools in our mission toolbox.

Brothers and sisters, this is your mission. Make disciples of Christ. If you see a new way to help us fulfill our mission, and if it doesn't cost the church's money or won't take away from other ministries the Lord has already raised up, go for it! And if it might cost money, or involve people already doing things, let your deacons and pastors know about it, so we can pray with you about the possibility of a new ministry to help us fulfill our mission.

Later today we'll be moving to our deacon care groups. Here are some questions we'll be discussing together...

-What happens to a church when it doesn't embrace it's God-given mission?

-What are some of the most encouraging ways you see the Lord working at WBC to fulfill this mission?

-What are some challenges we must overcome if we are to continue to fulfill our mission at WBC?