

The Making of a Disciple - Part 1

by David Roper

The sermon emphasizes the importance of making disciples, focusing on the quality of a person's life, and the need to present Christ and train people to be independently dependent on the Lord.

Duration: 34:27

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Matthew 28:16-20, John 15:8

Topics: "Discipleship Training", "Evangelism Ministry"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the Great Commission found in Matthew 28:19-20, where Jesus commands his disciples to go and make disciples of all nations. The main idea of the passage is to make disciples, not just gather followers or fans. The speaker emphasizes that making disciples involves obedience to God's Word and showing love to others. He also highlights the importance of staying with people, training and preparing them until they are independently dependent on the Lord and able to go on their own. The speaker encourages the audience to have a sensitive heart towards those who need God and to have the courage to share the message of Christ with them.

Transcript

While I was on my vacation this past summer, I was reading an account of the messages that were given at InterVarsity's Urbana Conference. And in those series of messages, there was one by Warren Webster, who was a missionary to Pakistan for some 15 years. And in reviewing his ministry, he had this to say, If I had my life to live over again, I would live it to change the lives of men.

Because you haven't changed anything until you've changed the lives of men. And that really struck me and caused me to reaffirm again in my own heart that that's what I want to do. I want God to use me to change the lives of men.

I don't think we are in any disagreement that the world is in wretched shape. And it's that way because there's something desperately wrong with men. It just strikes me repeatedly that the only answer to the world in which we find ourselves is the hearts of men.

And I know of only one person who can change the heart of a man, and that's Jesus Christ. And for the next three Sundays, I would like to talk to you about what Jesus Christ intends to do through us to make disciples, to disciple all nations for him. And this morning, I'd like to have you turn to the 20th chapter of Matthew in something of an introductory message to survey some of the ingredients that go into making a

disciple.

And we'll pick these up in more detail in following Sundays. Matthew 28, 16 through 20. This is a very similar passage to the one that was read earlier.

It's not a parallel passage because the section in Luke, the episode that took place there, actually preceded these events in Matthew 28 by some days. It took place in Jerusalem immediately after the resurrection. The events here in Matthew 28 took place at the end of our Lord's 40-day post-resurrection ministry to his disciples.

In this 40-day period, five times it's recorded in Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and Acts, the writers record that the Lord said that the prime task of the disciples was to make disciples. And this is just simply one of those times, one of those events. Now, the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.

And when they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

And lo, I am with you always to the close of the age. Lo, I am with you always to the close of the age. The disciples all died sometime the close of the first century.

So, these words were not addressed just to the disciples, but they have validity for all time. They're addressed to us. I'd like to talk about three things.

The men that are found in this passage, the mandate that was given to them to disciple all nations, and the method by which this mandate was to be carried out. These men intrigue me. They're said in contrast to the men that are referred to in the preceding paragraph.

A number of the leading Jews that were attempting to cover up the facts of Jesus' resurrection, to discredit the accounts of the disciples and others that had seen him. The reaction of the disciples is set over against their attempts to discredit the resurrection. Because these men, out of obedience to Jesus Christ, went to northern Galilee to meet the Lord there.

The others doubted, but not the disciples. Prior to the events of the cross and the resurrection of Christ, Jesus had told his disciples that after the resurrection they were to meet him in a mountain in northern Galilee. And they went out of obedience to him, knowing that they would see him there.

The passage says that some doubted, but it doesn't in any way indicate that these men were lacking in faith, because the word that's used here has no idea of lack of faith, but rather one of hesitancy. They were uneasy. And who wouldn't be? They still did not quite understand what the Lord intended to do.

Their hopes of establishing a kingdom on earth had been dashed. The Lord had been crucified, taken from them. They had seen him in his resurrection body.

And unquestionably, they were uneasy and hesitant and disturbed, not quite understanding what the Lord intended to do. But they went anyway, even though they were uneasy. And they were fearful, because the Lord had told them that the rulers of the Jews were going to take his life and that they would be next.

And they had enough confidence in his ability as a prophet. They believed him. They knew their lives were on the line.

And any association with this man would jeopardize their lives from this point on. So they were uneasy. They were anxious.

They were concerned. But they went anyway, because they trusted him. I think one of the amazing facts of this passage is the contrast between the extent of the commission that the Lord gave and the relative insignificance of this little band of men.

Here were eleven men that were told to go out and conquer the world and lay it at the Lord's feet. Eleven insignificant men. Now that would make anyone uneasy.

These were men who had never been more than fifty miles from home. They had probably never been outside the country of Palestine. They had ranged as far with the Lord in his ministry as they had ever ranged.

They were identified with a man who had no funds to carry on this assignment, who had no basis of political power, who had already been rejected by the nation, who had no leg to stand upon, and yet he tells them to go and make disciples of all nations. They realized that the secret of his success was not the size of the group, or the power of the group, or the material qualifications of the group, but rather the divine authorization that was given to them by the Lord. In verse 18, Jesus said, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

You go, therefore. The Father had given to the Son the authority, and the Son by means of the Holy Spirit gave to the disciples the authority to go out and for all time bring men into relationship with Him with the promise that all the resources, all the power of the Father was available to them if they would simply act upon it. The authority of a sovereign Lord who created men and by whom lives again could be recreated.

That was their authorization, and they needed no other. And within a period of a few weeks, historically, we know that they saw at first five thousand come into a relationship with their Lord. Within thirty-five years, they had planted churches in every major center in the Roman Empire.

And today, I heard Dr. David Hubbard say recently, there is not one place in the occupied world that is more than fifty miles away from an assembly of believers. They went out believing that it could be accomplished. And in the name and in the authority of Jesus Christ, they conquered the world.

And it's still going on today. Now, this was their motivation. Not just obedience to the Great Commission, but the inner impulse that comes from the realization that their Lord had the authority to accomplish the work that He had given to them.

As Paul says later, we believed and so we spoke. A little insignificant group, but with all the power of a sovereign Lord God available to them, and they accomplished. And as I say, they are still accomplishing what they set out to do.

Now, this leads me to some strong conclusions. The first is that God is not preoccupied with numbers. We are in other estimates of human strength and power.

We count noses. We measure success in terms of numbers, but the Lord never does. In His program, they are totally inconsequential.

Someone commented to me the other day after reading a prayer letter in which several large numbers were given, people that had come to Christ recently. His comment was, instead of counting them, why don't they weigh them? And the next prayer letter might come out, last week we saw 10,000 pounds of believers. You see, weight, numbers, none of these things have anything to do with what God intends to do, because He is not concerned about size.

Size has nothing to do with success. Success is always based on relationship. Always.

For instance, God was not at all embarrassed to send Elijah and his servant against the whole nation of Israel. That didn't bother God, because He knew that His servants could accomplish what He sent them to do, because they had available to Him His power. Or Jonah, sent to evangelize the whole city of Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire.

Or Paul and Barnabas, sent into Asia Minor to plant churches. Two men into a pagan area that had never heard the gospel. We would organize great armies to go, but the Lord sent Paul and Barnabas.

And later, Paul and Timothy into Europe to plant churches there. The Lord Himself spent three and a half years ministering first to the masses, and then drawing out of the masses 12 men, and eventually 11 men. And it was through these 11 men that He was able to accomplish His program.

He spent all of His time training them. We would get awfully discouraged if we spent three and a half years and we only had 11 people to accomplish a work, but yet the Lord said, I have finished the work that the Father gave me to do. Because He didn't measure His success in terms of size.

Size is not to be equated with success. There's an interesting passage in the book of Haggai, the account of Zerubbabel, the civil leader, and Joshua, the high priest who went back to Palestine to rebuild the temple that had been destroyed during the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. And the work was going slowly at first, and finally the temple was completed.

The people were terribly discouraged. In contrast to Solomon's temple, it was just a puny little thing. And their comment was, it's nothing in our eyes.

Haggai writes to the people, don't despise small things. Because the Lord says, I am with you, and my spirit will be with you, and I will fill this house with glory, and the desire of all nations will come into it, literally the one desire of all nations will come into it, and its latter splendor shall be greater than its former splendor. He was looking prophetically down through the years to the time when Messiah would stand in the middle of that very temple, the temple that Zerubbabel and Joshua built, one that had been expanded by Herod, but essentially the same temple, and fill it with His glory.

And the latter splendor was far greater than anything Solomon's temple possessed, with its gold and its ornate furniture and its jewels. And Haggai says the same thing to us today, don't despise the small thing, because God's splendor will fill it. The glory of Jesus Christ will control it and use it for His honor.

Now we can really get a complex about this. We look at our office and here we are, just two or three men, or maybe only one man. And what can we do to accomplish this program of making disciples here? Or we're on a campus and maybe we're the only Christian in the dorm.

What can we accomplish? And so we get discouraged and we want to quit, because we just don't feel that God can really accomplish all that He's promised to do. I think this last year at Stanford, we had one of the most difficult years of my life. And I've shared this with some of you, and this is just an open confession to the rest of you, because it's something that has been in many ways just the hardest thing for me to go through, but one of the times when God taught me so much about what He's attempting to do, and what He will do.

Some of you remember last year, we gathered a hundred people together to pray for that campus, and for the Foothill campus. And we began to send out prayer letters. And at the top we had this promise from Jeremiah, call unto me and I will answer you and show you great and mighty things which you know not.

And we believed that, and I still do, that God was going to do great things. But in my mind, I assumed the great thing He was going to do was to evangelize the Stanford campus, and the Foothill campus, and Pali High School, and Cubberley High School, and Ross Road Elementary School, and the whole community. And He didn't do it.

We had meetings, we confronted many men with the gospel, we saw men come to know Christ, but He did not do what I thought He was going to do. And it was the most discouraging thing that ever hit me. I thought God had failed.

He'd lied, that He couldn't do the great things that He had promised to do. But then the Lord began to show me what the great thing was, that there were a few men in whom Jesus Christ lived, and they were going on. They were growing and maturing in Christ, and they were winning their friends to Christ.

And in a quiet, underground way the Lord was accomplishing the great things that He had promised. And I believe it's going to go on. I think it can go on in your neighborhood, in your office, in your home, in your school, wherever God has put you.

That God will use you, not to reach the masses necessarily, but to touch lives significantly for Christ's sake. You may be outmanned, and outgunned, in terms of numbers and influence. But it's totally inconsequential in terms of God's reckoning, because He wants to use you to change lives.

Now there's a second strong conclusion that I come to as a result of looking at the lives of these men. God is not concerned about the quantity of men, but He is concerned about the quality of their lives. God's method is men, men who are controlled by the Spirit of God.

Not programs, not machinery, but men, women, students, boys, girls, anyone who's available to Him. And I believe that these disciples would be classified as that kind of a person. I think that very often we don't think very highly of these men, and it's sort of the thing to do to speak in a derogatory way about them.

But I can't accept the thought that Jesus totally misjudged these men. He was a man with God's insight into lives. He knew men, John tells us.

He knew the quality of their lives. He scrutinized the lives of these men. He spent time in prayer before He made this decision.

I don't think He chose wrongly even in the case of Judas, because He says that He knew from the very beginning what Judas was to be, and that even this man was chosen deliberately in order to accomplish the purposes of God, in terms of the prophetic statements of God. He knew these men, and He chose

them out of all the men that He contacted in Palestine, because He sensed that these men were not much at this point. He saw them not in terms of what they were, but what they were to become as He spent time with them, because He sensed they were men who had open hearts and minds, who were hungry, perhaps for the wrong things, but He took that hunger and turned it into a hunger for Him.

And as He trained them, gave them experience, then after His death and resurrection, He came back and indwelt them and began to accomplish through them this mandate that He left behind. He never dealt with men who played games, but only those who hungered and thirsted after righteousness. He said, follow Me, and I'll make you a fisher of men.

And God will put anyone to use who has the real thing, who has the quality of life that only a follower of Jesus Christ can have, because I'm convinced that people are looking for people who have the real thing. It's the only way I'm convinced we'll ever reach this disillusioned generation today. They're fed up with programs.

They're fed up with the institutional church. They see nothing but phoniness. Now they're looking for real people.

They listen to their songs and learn a lot about the way kids are thinking just by listening to the things that they listen to. The song popular now, God Bless You Please, Mrs. Robinson. Jesus loves you more than you can know.

Ho ho ho. And we say, that's blasphemy. That's right it is.

But if you listen to that song, you sense that what they're seeing is people who have said Jesus loves you, but they've never seen the love of Jesus in anyone's life. And so they say, ho ho ho, Jesus loves me. Tell me about it.

But when they see someone who really lives the love of Jesus Christ and whose life is different, then they'll listen. One of our interns was telling me this recently of a friend of his, a student who said, when I was a child, I used to walk up and down the beach and turn over sand crabs and poke them with a stick to see if there was anything in there. And he says, now I don't go on the beach and poke sand crabs, I poke people to see if there's anything in there.

And this is what they're doing. Now if you're real, to use the contemporary term, you'll be where the action is. Because people are looking for reality.

They're looking for quality. And if we have it, they're going to want it, and they'll seek us out. We don't have to be religious.

Please save us from religion. But we have to be real. People who are possessed by God and whose obsession is to serve Jesus Christ.

With all of the problems, the areas yet not under Christ's control, but yet a heart that really, really desires to serve. That kind of person God will use. Now can we look for a moment at the mandate? These are the men.

Now the mandate. Jesus said, verse 19, Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. There's one imperative here, to make

disciples.

The other ideas, the other action verbs, are all subordinate to this main idea to make disciples. Literally he says, having gone, make disciples by baptizing and by teaching. They tell us what's involved in making disciples.

His goal, and the main idea of this passage, is to make disciples. Not make friends for Jesus. Not make fans.

Not to develop a large following. Because Jesus said, there will never be many who will follow. Because to follow involves a cross.

And a cross means cutting off all of our own goals and purposes. The things for which we live. And settling once for all the issue in our life, that Jesus Christ is going to be Lord, and we're going to serve him.

And there will never be many that will make that kind of a decision. The Lord always drew the lion's heart and fast, and he said there would be very few that would step over. And when they did, he hit them immediately with his claim as Lord.

Are you willing to follow me and yield everything? Now we want to spend quite a bit of time talking about this, and I just want to mention it in general now, because we're going to come back to it next week and talk further. But I'm convinced that the great commission is not to go out and get decisions or just talk to people about Christ, but it's to present Christ and then to stay with people, to train them and prepare them until they themselves are independently dependent on the Lord and able to go on on their own. Jesus said there are three characteristics of a disciple, and we'll look at these in more detail later, but in John 8.31 he said, if you continue in my word, you are truly my disciple.

Obedience. John 13.35, by this all men will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another. Love.

John 15.8, by this my Father is glorified that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. A person who bears fruit. A loving, obedient, fruitful person.

We'll talk more about that later. Third, the method by which they were to accomplish this commission. Going.

This assumes that we will go. The command is not to go. The command is to make disciples.

It's preceded by the idea of going. And what he means is that as we go about seeking our livelihood, wherever we may be found, we're to use that place as a platform for presenting Jesus Christ and making disciples. Historically, these men were merchants, seamen, laborers.

Everywhere they went, they saw their prime task to make disciples. These other things were simply a means of making a livelihood. They were told to go through the whole world.

They had a little problem with this because like all of us, they liked to cluster and so God sent persecution. And where there's heat, there's always expansion. And they scattered the disciples all over the world and everywhere they went, making tents, repairing sales, making shoes as lawyers, merchants, whatever their task might be, they made disciples.

And that's how the gospel spread. What a tremendous vision of occupation this is. That our job, whether it's a housewife or out in the world as a business person, whatever it might be, our job essentially is to make disciples.

It gives tremendous dignity to our jobs. Yes, we're to do our jobs well, as unto the Lord. To give it the time and energy that's necessary to do it right.

And yes, our job is a means of bringing into submission all of created things, as the Lord said we must do. But it is first and foremost a platform for making disciples. And we have our whole lifetime to work out the exciting implications of that kind of a view.

And the Lord said we are to disciple all nations. All nations. Which means that some will go, must go to other lands.

Some will be cleared to live and minister in the land of their birth. And to engage in the worldwide program of making disciples through sacrificial giving or intercessory prayer or through an ongoing concern for what God is doing around the world. But again, what an exciting thing to know that we're engaged in an enterprise that's global in its scale.

That God is at work in every corner of the world to bring men into relationship with Him. We're just simply one segment, one part of what God is doing. Not only going, the Lord said we are to make disciples by baptizing and by teaching.

These Jews, these eleven men, would have understood what the Lord meant when He said by baptizing. Because Jews understood the rite of baptism to mean a symbol of repentance. Of moving out of the great mass of Judaism and identifying themselves with Messiah.

Baptism was simply the symbol that let the community know that they were identified with Messiah. And when the Lord said to these disciples to go out and baptize, they knew what He meant. Not just to indiscriminately baptize people, but to present Christ and as a mark of that identification with Him as Lord and as Messiah, they were to be baptized.

And they did this in obedience to His command, but not only that, they were to teach. They were to stay and tell these men, learn how to walk. There is both an extensive and an intensive aspect of this mandate.

They were to go to all nations, the Lord said, and teach all things that I have commanded you. Now this is an enormous task. And I don't think that there's a one of us that can say we're adequate for anything like this.

In fact, I think that there are two reactions, ones that I feel so keenly and I see in other people. Number one is to just get hardened about the whole thing and adopt an uninvolved sort of a spirit. We can't do the job, it's impossible, so why even try? Every attempt I've made, I've bungled it, I've turned people away, or I'm shy, or I'm ignorant, or I'll just live the life.

That's important, but using that as a screen for an unwillingness to talk to someone about what makes us different. And so we just become hardened and uninvolved. Or there is a tremendous desire in our hearts and we see the great needs, but we get frustrated.

And I think frustrated because we're trying to do God's work. You see, He is the Savior of the world, not me and not you. My responsibility is not to reach the world.

Jesus said my responsibility is my neighbor, the few people that God brings into my life and gives to me the opportunity to share my relationship with Christ with. And my neighbor may not necessarily be my next door neighbor because we have big six foot fences in our backyard and I hardly ever see my next door neighbor. It may be the man down at the office, it may be, it could be anyone.

It's the man in need, or the woman in need, or the student, or whoever it might be that God puts you into contact with this week. The most difficult thing about going is the last 18 inches. Getting over that little barrier of sharing with someone else what our Lord has done with us.

But Jesus said, I am with you to the end of the age. There is an adequate source, resource, for the task that God has outlined for us. Now, let's sing and use this week in this exciting venue.

Shall we pray? Our Lord, we know that to pray in this way means that you'll answer us. And we ask this week that you'll give us a sensitive heart to people who need you and who are looking for you. And we ask for the courage to say the thing that we desire to say.

We want to be used to change lives, to make disciples. We want to learn about the process. And so we ask that you'd instruct us this week.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

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