

Pastor Don Nelson

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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

**“THEREFORE GO” (Part 2)**  
**Matthew 28:16-20**

✍ Last week we explored Christ’s declarations of authority in Matthew 28:18 (“**All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me**”) and of presence in 28:20b (“**surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age**”). Many in the Church do not recognize them as being part of the Great Commission; yet they are what provide us with the inspiration and power we need to make disciples.

□ Today we are digging into verses 19-20a:

**“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.”**

This mandate can seem far removed from daily life. It can appear to be a pipe dream. In a culture that prizes tolerance it can sound intolerant. And in light of the heinous sins perpetrated under the pretext of Christian witness and mission – the medieval crusades, the brutal conquest of non-Europeans, the racism of some missionaries, the hate speech of groups like Westboro Baptist – it can feel embarrassing. No wonder we tend to go through the motions of our calling, leave it up to the “professionals,” give it mere lip-service, or ignore it all together!

But if we listen to it carefully, as if for the first time, as though Jesus was speaking to us (which he is) our response might be different. His words have the power to

inflame our imagination, enlighten our minds, stir our hearts, and plunge us into radical discipleship.

Our commission has two basic components.

✪ The first is going. Going is equal parts action and attitude.

🔗 The act of going is a pragmatic prerequisite of disciple making. For “**Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved,**” but “**How... can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent**” {Ro 10:14-15a}

For some, the journey is as short as the few steps over to the next cubicle. For others, it requires crossing the ocean. Either way, we must go to those who have not yet called on the name of the Lord.

♥ But that is not all. “**Going**” also clarifies our attitude toward the world.

As fallen beings we are prone to retreat from discomfort and risk, and the unredeemed world is full of both. As a wise man observed, “**It’s a dangerous business...going out your door. You step out onto the road, and if you don’t keep your feet, there’s no knowing where you might be swept off to**” {Tolkien}.

→ Yet Jesus set aside the comfort and security of “**equality with God**” {Php 2:7} when he “**came to seek and to save what was lost**” {Lk 19:10}. Scripture instructs that our “**attitude should be the same as [his]**” {Php 2:5} in this. What is more, as we are gradually “**conformed to the likeness of [the] Son**” {Ro 8:29} our

mindset increasingly reflects his, so that we want to go; or, at any rate, we *want* to want to go. “**Therefore,**” let us “**go.**”

✪ The second component of our commission is to make disciples.

📖 The Greek word translated “**disciple**” is μαθητες (matheetes). It means “**one who follows another’s teaching.**” A disciple is one who learns from their teacher for the purpose of obeying their Teacher.

No disciple is perfect this side of eternity. Taking “**off [the] old self... and [putting] on the new**” {Col 3:9-10} is a life-long process marked by growth spurts *and* stagnation, great strides upward and stumbles downward.

✝ Nevertheless, Jesus himself said that his disciple is one: who loves him best (Matthew 10:37); obeys his commands (John 14:15); rejects self-interest and embraces the cross (Mark 8:35); resembles him in thought, word and deed (Matthew 10:25); and loves their brothers and sisters (John 13:35). That is what a disciple is. Our orders are to “**Go and make**” more of them.

But *how shall we do this?* By “**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.**” In the Greek these phrases are grammatically subordinate to “**make disciples.**” They describe the means by which Christ Followers are to “**make disciples.**” On the flip side, they define what must happen in a person’s life if they are to become a disciple of Jesus.

① The first means of disciple-making is baptism. It is not a stretch to insert the word “**by**” here: “**make**

**disciples of all nations, [by] baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.**”

◆ This has a double meaning. On the physical level it entails the sacrament of water baptism. To be sure, the formal ceremony is not sufficient for discipleship (many who undergo baptism, whether as infants or as older, accountable individuals, never become disciples); even so, the biblical evidence reveals that it is essential to discipleship. That will make some of us Protestants squirm, but there you have it.

✧ On the spiritual level, baptizing entails ushering others into fellowship with God. We are baptized “**in**” (or “**into**”) “**the name of the Father... Son and... Holy Spirit.**” In Scripture, name is equivalent to identity. So baptism of the body, mind, heart and spirit in/into God’s name is initiation into deep intimacy with, and commitment to, God himself.

☆ Spiritual baptism thoroughly immerses us in Jesus – so thoroughly that we begin to absorb his characteristics, virtues, and intentions. Galatians 3:27: “**As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.**”

☆ Spiritual baptism makes us participants in, and beneficiaries of, Christ’s death and resurrection. Romans 6:3-4: “**Don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as**

**Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”**

☆ Spiritual baptism unites us with Christ’s earthly body, the Church. First Corinthians 12:13: **“For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.”**

Baptizing with physical water is a simple matter, *but how do we perform spiritual baptism?*

✎ We don’t! The Holy Spirit does this baptizing.

☺ However, God is well able to “[work] in [us] to will and to act according to his good purpose” {Php 2:13} of drawing people to him. We can cooperate with God by: a) praying for those who are not in fellowship with God; b) modeling the beauty and power of union with God to them in our relationships and actions; and c) witnessing to them with words.

Baptism is the first means of disciple-making.

② The second means is coaching them in practical obedience to Christ.

→ Let us acknowledge at the outset that there is nothing casual about Christian discipleship. It is a rigorous life that goes beyond intellectual belief, verbal confession and church membership. Lord Jesus warned, **“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only [the one] who does the will of my Father”** {Mt 7:21}.

☞ The question is, *how do we coach obedience?* By: a) directly teaching and preaching what Jesus did and commanded (to answer, “What would Jesus do and say?” we must know what Jesus actually did and said); b)

modeling discipleship in word, deed and relationship (following Christ is caught at least as much as it is taught); and c) spurring each other on with words of affirmation, counsel and, when necessary, appropriate correction.

☆ This requires *us* to know what Jesus did and commanded. Discipleship coaches study the Gospels (which recount Christ’s earthly ministry) *and* the Old Testament (which sets it in context) *and* the New Testament epistles (which interpret it).

☆ This requires us to pursue maturity in faithfulness and obedience. We are most fruitful and effective in training disciples when we ourselves continue to **“grow in the knowledge and the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”** {2 Pe 3:19}.

☆ This also requires *us* to practice mutual accountability. **“We urge you, beloved, to admonish the idlers, encourage the faint-hearted, help the weak, be patient with all of them”** (1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 5:14, {NRSV}). Jesus himself said, **“If another disciple sins ... rebuke the offender, and if there is repentance, you must forgive”** (Luke 17:3 {NRSV}).

Certain conditions must be in place for this to even begin to work: hope (we must trust God to show up, because we cannot do it in our strength); physical presence (we must be *together*); interdependence (mutual accountability does not work well in a strong hierarchy; we all must give of our strengths and receive in our weaknesses); good will (we must want the best for each other); faith (we must call forth the

best in each other); patience (we must give each other time to grow); humility (we must each recognize our own brokenness); a climate of mercy (we must be slow to take offense and quick to forgive); a teachable spirit (we must be open to conviction and willing to change); gentleness (honesty does not excuse using our words to bludgeon each other: we must speak and act tenderly), among other things. Mutual accountability is never easy.

Little about the Great Commission is. Even so, He to whom **“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given”** is calling us to **“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.”**

But let us take courage! Our commission ends with this amazing promise: **“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”**