

Niagra Bible Conference
How to Make a Disciple - Selected Scriptures

INTRODUCTION & REVIEW

We have spent our first two sessions examining the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20. The context of that passage takes place in Galilee after Jesus' resurrection when He was giving His followers final instructions before returning to Jerusalem to ascend to Heaven. Jesus says *"All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. "*

As we have already seen, this commandment to make disciples of all nations can be carried out because of who Jesus is and the authority given to Him. Your success is dependent upon your availability, worship of the Lord and willingness to obey Him and not because of who you are or the particular abilities you possess. Jesus has all authority over all creation. In practical terms that means that He has both the right to command you and the power to enable you to do what He says. The command itself is to make disciples of all nations which is accomplished by going, baptizing and teaching.

It is our responsibility to go out to non-believers and tell them about Jesus, what He has done for them, and how He wants them to live. That encompasses local evangelism, local cross cultural missions and distant cross cultural missions as we seek to have the gospel preached throughout the whole world. Those that turn and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ need to identify with Him through baptism. There is nothing magical about baptism. It is simply an act of obedience by which the individual professing faith proclaims to the world their belief and trust in Jesus Christ alone for salvation from sin and identifying with His death, burial and resurrection just as Paul explains in Romans 6. It is a symbolic profession of the disciple of Jesus dying to their old self and rising to new life in Christ. Those who profess faith in Jesus and have not been baptized as a believer need to do that as soon as possible. If that is the case for anyone present, I don't think there would be any difficulty in arranging for that to happen today. Just talk to me or Tom Broderick. Do not continue in disobedience to Christ.

The bulk of making disciples is to teach them to obey all things whatsoever He has commanded. As has been previously pointed out, Jesus did not leave the glories of heaven and become a man just so that man could escape Hell. Jesus came to break the bonds of sin and restore man back to the purpose for which he was created which is to glorify God and do His will. We are saved so that we can be slaves of righteousness (Romans 6) that are holy and blameless before Him (Eph. 1:4). God is busy doing the work of conforming us to the image of His Son through the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:29) and He will continue to perfect us until the day of Christ Jesus (Phil. 1:6). The Christian needs to know both what the Lord has said and how to live according to His commandments, principles and precepts. Every disciple of Christ will be doing that the rest of their life.

Somehow we have to carry out the Great Commission in practical terms. It is one thing to say go and do it, and it is quite another to actually accomplish it. Where do you start? How do you get the process going? This morning I want us to consider the model that Jesus gave of *How to Make a Disciple*.

Remember that a "disciple" is simply a "learner," a "follower of a teacher." Remember also that being a disciple of Jesus is not an option for a Christian. The term "Christian" itself means "little Christ" or "Christ one" and comes from Acts 11:26 which informs us, the *"disciples were first called Christians in Antioch."* There is no separation in the Bible between those who are saved and those who are disciples of Christ. Everyone who is saved from their sins is a disciple of Jesus Christ. Now please take careful note that Jesus has not commanded us to go out and save people. We cannot do that anyway for only God can actually save someone. Jesus has commanded us to go out and make disciples. Proclaiming the gospel with the result that someone becomes a believer and is saved is simply the first element in making a disciple. That may sound simple enough, yet it is also the first area of failure in making a disciple.

THE FAILURE OF AMERICAN EVANGELISM

Evangelism has changed radically in America over the last century with the preaching of the gospel becoming increasingly man centered. Even churches that were at one time doctrinally sound have become liberal in their evangelism. Their goal in evangelism switched from a faithful proclamation of the gospel so that people would repent from their sin and turn in faith to Christ to seeing how many they could "save" from hell and send to heaven. In true American style, this was to be done as quickly and efficiently as possible. The result has been a distorted gospel bent to appeal to our natural self centeredness. We want to get what is good and avoid what is bad, so a message of avoiding a bad life and Hell and gaining a good life and heaven became the marketing strategy, though the "wonderful life" and heaven was left up to however the individual might define that. The desired effect of the message was no longer repentance from sin, but just some sign of cognitive desire such as walking the aisle at the invitation, raising a hand for the evangelist, and praying the "sinner's prayer," all supposedly resulting in salvation.

American pragmatism to do whatever works has further distorted the gospel. Hellfire and brimstone preachers use fear. Most evangelists use emotionalism. The church growth people use the Madison Avenue approach to market Jesus and get the person so sign on for salvation before they fully realize who Jesus is and what He saves people from. That is why they avoid mentioning sin, repentance, a changed life or the lordship of Christ until after the person has prayed to receive Christ, if even then. Why? Because talking about such things might scare the person away. Meanwhile, the emergent church folks just want to enjoy the conversation and balk at the idea that there actually are things that are absolutely wrong.

The consequences of this distorted gospel is a nation where the vast majority of people still claim to be Christians, with the majority of those also claiming to have had a "born again" experience, and yet the nation is awash in immorality and continuing to decline. The statistical difference in the social markers between those professing Christianity and non-Christian is insignificant.

Some years ago when I was in Los Angeles, a young man in our church named Garrett had a great desire to reach the street people for Christ. He developed a whole ministry to them. He would go out and talk with them on the streets, preach in parks and even developed a special service for them that might be more "culturally relevant." Garrett had plenty of opportunities to talk with these people, but as time went on, Garrett became discouraged and even a little angry. He consistently found that most of these street people, which included drug addicts, alcoholics, prostitutes and bums, had already heard the gospel with most professing to have "made a decision for," "received," or "accepted" Christ at some point in

their life, yet they continued to live messed up and sinful lives. A lot of people in our churches are like that except their sins are a little more socially acceptable.

Garrett wanted to know why the gospel had not made a difference in their lives as it had in his own? They would talk with him, but would do nothing toward actually striving to walk with Christ. What had gone wrong? Simply put, these people were "saved" but not converted. They had Jesus sold to them in a way that brought an initial response, but when the whole truth about the gospel started to come through they did not want anything to do with it. In a sense, they were actually inoculated against the true gospel. Like a vaccine that works because the body develops antibodies to a disease because it is given something close too but not the actual disease, these people had been given something was close to the truth but not the actual truth so that when they were finally told the truth they rejected it because they thought it was what they already had.

Someone, probably well meaning, had come to these people and in a great desire to see them saved from hell had persuaded them to respond to an invitation to receive Christ. That evangelist probably went away thinking things were wonderful and he had saved another soul. I have found that many evangelist love to boast about how many people were saved during their meetings, but the tragic reality is that most of those supposedly saved were not. There was no change in their lives, no new relationship developed with God, no desire demonstrated by them to learn of God and how to live for Him, and no desire to be with God's people. They never became disciples of Jesus Christ. Their professed belief was consistently contradicted by their actions, attitudes other beliefs. I know because I grew up seeing plenty of revival & evangelistic meetings and rarely saw any lasting results from them.

THE TRUTH ABOUT SALVATION

The gospel is the good news that God Himself has provided a way through faith in Christ for the sinner to be made righteous and be reconciled to his Creator. Salvation has to do with being made free from the bondage of sin (Romans 6). Being saved from hell is simply a side benefit. Hell is the consequence of being estranged from God due to your sin (2 Thess. 1:8,9). Heaven is the consequence of having the bondage to sin broken and being made righteous before God through Jesus Christ (Rom. 4,6 & 8). The gospel message is the good news that this is all made possible through Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 5:17,18).

The gospel is an invitation to enter into a relationship with Jesus as His disciple (Matt. 16:24). It is in following after Jesus that a person learns about their own sinfulness, who Jesus is, what He has done and how that is appropriated into their own lives through faith. That is why Jesus' command is for us to make disciples of all nations by going to them, baptizing them, and teaching them to observe whatsoever He has commanded. We invite men and women to Jesus, but He is the one that saves them. We then teach those that respond what He has commanded and help them to obey Him. You cannot be saved unless you become Jesus' disciple. You must be willing to pick up your cross and follow Him (Mark 8:34). In order to be one of His sheep, you must hear His voice and follow Him, and He gives eternal life to those that do (John 10:27-28).

JESUS' INVITATIONS

Jesus pattern of calling people to Himself is quite different modern American evangelistic methods. Jesus made it easy to say no, and on occasion He even made it very hard to say yes. Jesus did not sell Himself. He did not come with a quick fix for sin or an easy way to heaven. He did come calling people to turn from their sin and inviting people to develop a new

relationship with Him and the Father. The pattern of the apostles was the same. Let me point out a some examples of this beginning with the calling of His first disciples.

Turn to John 1:35. Jesus' public ministry opens along the banks of the Jordan River near its southern end. John was there baptizing people for repentance in preparation for the coming of the kingdom. John has baptized Jesus and now he points Jesus out to some of his disciples. 35 *"Again the next day John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked upon Jesus as He walked, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. And Jesus turned, and beheld them following, and said to them, "What do you seek?" And they said to Him, "Rabbi (which translated means Teacher), where are You staying?" He said to them, "Come, and you will see." They came therefore and saw where He was staying; and they stayed with Him that day, for it was about the tenth hour."*

In verses 40 & 41 we find out that one of these two men is Simon Peter's brother, Andrew, and that they had been looking for the Messiah to come. The other disciple is not named in the text, but the evidence suggests that it was John. Now Jesus did not come up to Andrew and John and say, "I am the Messiah, follow Me." Instead, he responded to their question about where He was staying with, *"Come and see"* (vs. 38-39). Jesus let their interest in finding the Messiah be the basis for inviting them to spend the rest of the day with Him. The result of this is that they would come to their own conclusion instead of having one forced upon them by either coercion or persuasion.

After spending the day with Jesus, Andrew was convinced that Jesus was the Messiah, so he went and told his brother, Peter, and then brought him to Jesus (John 1:41-42). The day after that, Jesus found Philip and invites him to follow Him to Galilee (John 1:43). Philip then went and found Nathanael and told him they (Peter and Andrew) had found the one promised in the law and prophets (John 1:44-45). Nathaniel was not so sure and Philip invited him to "come and see." He did not argue with Philip. He simply invited him to find out for himself (John 1:46). All of them then went with Jesus back to Galilee.

Your task is easy when people are already interested in what you are offering, but note what Jesus did not do. He did not force them to come and neither did He ask them for a commitment beyond coming and spending time with Him. Jesus did not recruit them and "sign them up." Any of them could easily have said no for a variety of reasons. Jesus let their already stated interest be the basis for inviting them to learn more about Him. They would have to be convinced of who He was before a greater commitment could be made. In this case, it only took a day to convince them that Jesus was the Messiah, so it was easy for them to make the next level of commitment to go with Him back to Galilee.

On the way back to Galilee they would stop in Cana for a wedding and see Jesus' first miracle (John 2). Since the relationship developed further on that trip, they then went with Him to Jerusalem for Passover (John 2 - note also that going back to Galilee was not out of their way since they were all from that area, and going to Jerusalem at Passover was the normal thing for good Jews to do anyway). Their lives were changed as they traveled with Jesus. They learned more of Him, became more confident in Him, and more willing to do what He would ask. They would all return to their normal jobs for awhile before Jesus would offer the next invitation to follow Him again. This occurs in Matthew 4 in which Jesus meets them on the shore of the Sea of Galilee and invites them to leave their fishing trade and *"Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men."*

Jesus came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10), but that was by calling them to repent and become His followers. Matthew records that during Jesus early ministry He preached the same message as John the Baptist, *"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."* Jesus was

gentle and compassionate towards people even to the point of near physical exhaustion as He taught, preached the gospel of the kingdom and healed the people of their diseases and cast out demons (Matt. 4:23; Mark 6:31f). At the same time, Jesus was direct in His preaching to expose the hearts of the people so that they might turn from their sin and follow Him.

In the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7), Jesus began with the beatitudes which described the characteristics of those who would be part of the kingdom of heaven and called people to a righteousness that must exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees. Jesus then exposed the hypocritical teachings and practices of the those religious leaders by comparing them to what God actually wanted. Jesus concluded the sermon with a warning about false teaches and a call to be wise in hearing and acting on what he in order avoid the destruction that would come upon the fools that would hear but would not obey. Jesus presented the truth with a call to obey it and a warning to those that do not. He did not make it easy to believe, and He actually made it impossible for someone who wanted to profess belief but not obey.

In John 3 Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night to get some of his questions answered. Jesus simply explained to Nicodemus what he should have already known as a ruler in Israel (vs 1). There is no emotional appeal, but a simple declaration of the truth with both its positive and negative aspects. Jesus used an Old Testament story to explain to that Nicodemus what He was teaching. Nicodemus would have understood the point. Numbers 21 records that God had sent poisonous snakes among the Israelites in the wilderness as punishment for their rebellion. If you got bit by one of these fiery serpents you would die. The only cure was to believe what God had told Moses. God had Moses make a statue of a bronze serpent and set it on a standard. God then said that anyone who was bit by a snake that would go look at that bronze serpent would live. If you did not go you would die. Professing belief without action would still result in death. Belief had to be demonstrated by the action corresponding to that belief. Jesus did not make it easy. Eternal life would be given to those that would come and believe on Jesus and Jesus correlated belief, coming to the light and practicing the truth. All three are elements that exist in a person who is given eternal life. Those who manifest the opposite of disbelief, loving the darkness and practicing evil would remain condemned.

Jesus laid out the truth and let Nicodemus wrestle with the ramifications in his own life. From the beginning of their conversation Jesus simply brings Nicodemus to an ever greater understanding of the truth. There is warning, but no coercion, no intimidation, no forcing Nicodemus into a decision he is not ready to make. We do not find out until the end of the book that Nicodemus did indeed become of one of Jesus' followers.

In John 4 we find a similar approach with the woman at the well. Jesus gains this woman's interest by breaking the prejudicial social norms in asking her for a drink. He then turned the conversation to spiritual things to both expose her sinful heart and declare the truth to her. She eventually reveals her own expectation for the coming Messiah and Jesus tells her that He is the Messiah. She then goes and invites the rest of the town to come and see Jesus out for themselves. At their request, Jesus stayed two days and many came to believe because of His word (4:41). Jesus did not coerce, intimidate, or force anyone into decisions. Jesus simply gained their interest, proclaimed truth and responded to their desire to know more.

Jesus does not try to sell Himself. There are no emotional appeals made to sway large numbers of people to follow Him. His many miracles would attract people to follow Him and have an initial belief in Him, but invariably Jesus would teach something that would result in many of those people leaving. Jesus not only made it easy for someone to say no to Him, He continued to make it more difficult to say yes.

A very revealing example of this occurs in John 6. There were many that followed Jesus because He had just feed the 5,000 plus with 5 loaves and two fish. Jesus knew that their "belief" was shallow and would soon dry up. In verse 29 He responded to the people's request to know what work they should do for God saying, *"This is the work of God, that you believe in Him who He has sent."* A great start for an evangelistic message to get them all "saved," but as Jesus continued the people found His teaching difficult (vs 60). Jesus responded to their grumbling in verse 64 by stating directly that He knew there were some there that did not believe, and in vs 65 Jesus adds, *"For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me, unless it has been granted him from the Father."* That was the last straw for many. Verse 66 says, *"As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew, and were not walking with Him anymore."* Was Jesus a lousy evangelist or is "making disciples" something different than the American evangelical concept of getting people "saved."

It gets worse in John 8. Verse 30 states that many came to *"believe in Him"* as He spoke about being the light of the world. Yet in the next verse we find that Jesus is saying to *"those Jews who had believed Him, 'If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.'"* These same Jews took this as a challenge. In the course of the dialogue Jesus declares that they were seeking to kill Him (vs. 37,40) and that they were doing the deeds of their father the devil (44). They in turn lied (33), insinuated that Jesus was illegitimate (41,48), was demon possessed (48), and then picked up stones to stone Him for blasphemy (59). Obviously from this incident we must conclude that there must be some more substance to belief that brings salvation than the kind of belief these people had.

In John 10 we see Jesus go another round with the Pharisees. They wanted to know if Jesus was or was not the Christ (vs. 24). By the time their conversation was ended they had again picked up rocks to stone Jesus (31). Jesus told them that even if they did not believe what He said, they should believe the works He did (38) - yet they were still seeking to seize him (39). Jesus then left and went beyond the Jordan where John had been baptizing. Some of those who had been in Jerusalem went there to hear more from Jesus and "many believed in Him there" (42).

You can trace the same pattern in the lives of the Apostles. Peter in Acts 2, 3, 4 & 5 is very direct with the people and the religious leaders in declaring truth about Jesus and calling upon them to repent even placing upon them the responsibility for Jesus' death. Paul's pattern was to go to the Jewish synagogues first and preach Jesus Christ until the message was rejected, then he would work with those who had interest while also proclaiming the gospel to the Gentiles. When there was not a synagogue, he would go wherever he could get people to listen and he would preach Christ to them. He often would preach in the market place. In Acts 17 he proclaimed Christ to the philosophers on Mars Hill in Athens with the result that most rejected the message, but a few responded wanting to know more. He then taught them so that they would be followers of Christ.

Inviting People to Follow Jesus

The first step of making a disciple is evangelism and evangelism is not getting the person saved, it is telling them the truth about Jesus. That does not necessarily mean we tell them everything at once. Jesus caught the interest of people and invited them to come to Him, learn of Him and to believe in Him. But at the same time Jesus allowed people the room to say no, and He would make it harder for those that started to follow Him to continue doing so. In some cases Jesus made it very difficult to yes to follow Him. The example of the rich young ruler in Mark 10 that I talked about in an earlier session is a case in point. Jesus

invited the man to be his disciple, but all this man wanted was a means by which he could gain eternal life for himself. In rejecting Jesus' offer he also lost the opportunity for eternal life. We state the truth and might even beg people to be reconciled to God as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5, but we do not change the gospel until it is acceptable to them.

We need to follow Jesus' example. We take advantage of a person's interests to talk them about Jesus and see if there is an interest. If there is, then we invite them to learn more about Him.

Talking to others about Jesus should be the outflow of our relationship with Him. We naturally talk to people about the things that are important to us. Our relationship to God should not be a separate subject to talk about, but one that intertwines with everything we do. We talk about the weather - we talk about God's power. We talk about our jobs - we talk about God's sustenance. We talk about our family - we talk about God's design for husbands, wives, parents, children. We talk about science - we talk about God's creation. We talk about history - we talk about God's providence. We talk about politics - we talk about God's sovereignty and moral directives to all nations. We talk about the news - we talk about God's wrath on sin and His mercy to mankind. There is no subject we can talk about that God does not somehow figure in, but do we talk about Him?

Those that profess to believe and desire to personally proclaim identity as a follower of Jesus Christ, we baptize. We dare not make baptism easy so that people with false professions will point to their baptism as proof of their salvation. At the same time, we don't make it so difficult that you need a college Bible degree. We simply ask enough questions to clarify what the person actually does believe about Jesus and that there is enough spiritual fruit in their life to identify them as one of His disciples.

Jesus spent a total of three years with the men He called as His disciples. They ate together. They traveled together. They worked together. They lived together. Jesus poured His life into them teaching them by word and deed who God is, what He has done and how He wanted them to live. He taught them God's commandments and how to live according to them. He corrected them when they failed. He encouraged them when they were weak and fainthearted. Jesus also sent them out on ministry assignments so that they would see God at work through them and learn to trust Him more. All of that prepared His disciples to in turn do the same with others teaching them about God, His commandments and how to live according to them. They were discipled by Jesus and in turn were able to disciple others to also follow Jesus.

The Apostles also followed that pattern. Church history reveals many of the men that were disciples of particular apostles, and they in turn developed disciples who in turn did the same thing with that pattern repeating until the present day. Paul called on the Corinthian believers to "*Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ*" (1 Cor. 11:1). He told Timothy to take what he had learned from Paul and "*entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also*" (2 Timothy 2:2).

That is the pattern for us to follow and how you make a disciple.

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