

MISSIONS POSSIBLE - "Go and Tell"

Over the past few weeks, I've referred to the Great Commission several times. Today we'll take a closer look at it. We'll begin in **Matthew 28:16-20**. Before we read it, we should remember the setting. Jesus has risen from the dead. His followers are summoned to a meeting with Him.

¹⁶ The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷ When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted. They worshipped_ but some doubted? How could they? He was standing right in front of them. But, put yourselves in their sandals. They'd seen Jesus tortured to death. They'd seen Him placed in the tomb. It must've been surreal to see Him now. Perhaps still in a state of confusion, they try to wrap their minds around it, when: **¹⁸ Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ 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, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."**

Now, Jesus sets the stage by asserting His authority. He'd claimed to be the Son of God. Here He is now as living proof. And if God's Son tells you to do something_ well, you'd best pay attention. So, He tells them to **"Go and make disciples."** This is not put forth as an option. Nor does He ask for volunteers. In essence, they are to *"Go, because He said so."* By default, this responsibility is passed onto us, for as His disciples, we're to do all that He commanded them to do.

There's a formula Jesus gives for doing that. Here, we see that making disciples includes baptism and teaching. And obviously, this was always to be prefaced with the sharing of the Gospel. He said in **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."** Pretty straight forward. They understood their mission and they went out to fulfill it.

Yet, evidently they did not understand it quite the way we do. The apostles did not go on a mission trip to a foreign country. They started sharing the good news in their hometown_ and according to **Acts 8:1**, they kept right on doing that even when things got tough. **"On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria."** Why? Weren't they told to **"Go"**? Yes_ but they understood Jesus to say, *"Go forth from here and tell everyone you meet about the good news."* In fact, Luke tells us that Jesus stressed that there message would begin in Jerusalem, spread to Judea and Samaria, and then eventually into the rest of the world. **(Luke 24)** One more thing: **Acts 8:4** tells us **those who were scattered preached the word wherever they went.**

So, they went and shared the gospel in their neighborhoods and throughout their city, realizing that this would not be accomplished in a single tent meeting_ or even a in a week- long Gospel meeting. It was going to require them investing themselves into the community that they lived in. And guess what? That's what's required in Rockford, Illinois right now.

The Church sends missionaries abroad who pour out their hearts and lives for the sake of the Gospel and we're amazed to hear of the conversions that happen there. Meanwhile we often lament that so few come to accept Christ in our hometown. We've bought the idea the soil is more fertile there. Or the missionaries we send are more gifted or knowledgeable than we are. But, let me ask this: **What if we did what those missionaries do?** What if we invested ourselves in preaching the gospel in our own community like they do in theirs? What if we prayed for hearts to be opened and looked for opportunities to share Jesus_ and then jumped at the chances when they were presented? Let me share some personal experiences.

Nina and I had been sharing our faith in one way or another for several years in our hometown in Ohio when I heard the call to go into full time ministry. While preparing to fill a pulpit stateside, I felt the Lord urging me to go overseas_ and I did. Over the course of the next several years, I shared Jesus in prisons and hospitals, on college campuses and street corners in the UK. I preached for two churches about **45** minutes from one another – one on Sunday morning and one Sunday afternoon. I found that people always responded_ but it wasn't always favorably. Sometimes I was mocked. On at least one occasion, I was threatened. But, there were some who were open. Some of our neighbors and friends we'd made took steps of faith. A few I worked with at the local hospital did too_ as well as some of the patients I ministered to. With help from visiting mission teams, the whole city was leafleted with gospel tracts at least ½ dozen times. Some we met through that effort came to faith and were baptized into Christ. The Lord led us to a Chinese college student whom we invited into our home. Nina and I studied with her as she read from a Mandarin Chinese Bible and she also was united with Christ. She brought her fiancé' to us and in a short while he too accepted Jesus. They so much became part of our family that a year later I walked her down the aisle in a little church in Belfast and gave her away to him in marriage. One of my daughters also served as her bridesmaid_ and my wife Nina was the matron of honor.

When we returned to the states, I began pastoring for a church in Michigan. Once again, we simply shared our faith with those God brought into our lives and some of them accepted Jesus. There was a family who lived across the street from the church whom I waved to and said, "Nice day" whenever I saw them. We leafleted the neighborhood for our VBS, but their kids never came. Then, I heard through the grapevine the wife had stage 4 cancer and was in hospice care. When I went and offered to pray with her, Judy told me she'd once been a devout Christian_ but somewhere along the way had lost faith. I prayed with her about that_ went back to the church and called Nina to arrange for some of our ladies to take them meals. After Judy died, Mark and I maintained close contact, and our church continued to take meals to his family on Wednesday nights for **12** more months. Mark invited me over to talk, confessing that he wasn't sure about Jesus, but he wanted to know more. He and his younger kids began to attend services and in time he embraced Jesus as His Savior. He eventually met Larine in a grief support group_ and after counseling them, I was honored to join them in marriage_ as well as to assist her in uniting with Christ in baptism. Mark soon became a deacon in the church. We are close friends_ and they visited us here just last week.

Since I have been in Rockford, I have employed the same principle. I try to share the good news with whomever God leads me to. Whether at a hospital, the county jail, a nursing home, a homeless shelter, the neighborhood school, or right here in this church_ I have one goal. I want to tell people about Jesus. Some of you here know Him now because I cared to do that_ but think about it. All of you here who now know Jesus know Him because someone cared enough to do that. Someone, in the midst of their busy schedule took time to tell you about the One who was before all time. They went an extra mile to tell you of the One who came from heaven to earth to save you from death. As they were going about, taking care of their daily duties, they told you about Jesus.

I pray that all of you here at Calvary can say you're closer to Jesus since we met_ or you at least have a better grasp of His mercy and grace_ of what He did for you on the cross. If not, I've failed to do the one thing I'm called to do: Preach the gospel_ the incredible good news that God loves you and sent Jesus to save you. Hear me. I'm no one special, but **I know someone Who is_** and His name is Jesus. The more I remember **my responsibility is to introduce people to Him**, the more I realize it's not about me. What I want you to understand today is that it's not about where you go _ overseas, cross country, or just next door. It's about who you are. If you're a disciple of Christ, you have the same call I do. You're to **share Jesus**.