

The mission of the church (2): make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19a)

Reading: Matthew 16:13–27

After His resurrection and before returning to heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ, by the full authority in heaven and upon earth given to Him, commissioned His disciples to make disciples of all nations. That task is the mission of the church to the end of the age. To fulfill that mission it is important to understand not only how to do it, but even more basically what a disciple is.

I. What is a disciple?

1. In New Testament times a ‘disciple’ was a person who associated him or herself with a teacher and learned from that teacher. Disciples often physically traveled with their teacher learning from him.
2. Jesus had already described the nature of being His disciple earlier (Matthew 16:24–26; cf. Luke 14:26–27).
 - a. The context implies a condition for being a disciple which becomes explicit elsewhere: the confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:16; cf. Romans 10:9a) and belief in His death and resurrection (Matthew 16:21; cf. Romans 10:9b). (See also 1 Corinthians 15:3–7.)
 - b. The first explicit condition of being a disciple of Jesus is to deny oneself which includes putting Christ as your purpose for living, rather than self, and relying upon Him, rather than having confidence in yourself.
 - c. The second explicit condition is to take up one’s cross, which is a voluntary, personal act. In the culture bearing one’s cross led to execution and was a humiliating submission to the authority against which one had rebelled. Figuratively, the disciple acknowledges that his or her rebellion against God is worthy of death and identifies him or herself with the One who took up His cross and voluntarily died in the place of the believer.
 - d. The final explicit condition is simply ‘follow me’, that is, leave all behind and commit fully to a life with Jesus (cf. Matthew 4:20–22; 8:19, 9:9; 19:21, 27).
3. Jesus argues that such commitment is only logical: the preservation of a self-centered life will only lead to its loss, but giving it up for Christ’s sake will gain eternal life (16:25); even gaining the whole world is not worth the loss of your soul (16:26); a future day of reckoning by Jesus Christ is coming, so it is best to assure now what the future rewards will be (16:27).

Being a disciple is a life and death issue with eternal consequences. Therefore, you need to get the mission right.

II. How do you make disciples of all nations?

1. *Proclaim Christ*
 - a. Proclaiming Christ is implicit in the command to make disciples because being His disciple had already focused on His person (cf. Matthew 4:18–22; 9:9; 19:18–22; 7:24–27; 8:19–22; 11:28–30; 20:29–34).
 - b. Proclaiming Christ is explicit in the other Gospel records and in the actions of the Apostles (Mark 16:15; Luke 24:46–47; Acts 1:8; 1 Corinthians 1:23; 2:2; Acts 14:21–23).
 - c. Proclaiming Christ is the foundation for you to make disciples. It is necessary for bearing spiritual fruit and is more important than winning arguments. To be saved a person must believe and to believe they must first hear of Christ (Romans 10:13–14).
2. *Go to all nations*
 - a. Going is implicit in the commission in Matthew and the other records.
 - b. Going can happen providentially, such as through normal travel or through persecution (Acts 8:1; 11:19; cf. 18:2).
 - c. Going can happen purposefully (Acts 13:2–3; Romans 10:14b–15a).
 - d. Going can be a shared responsibility, such as releasing some for ministry (Acts 13:1–3) and praying for those who have gone (Philippians 1:19; 2 Corinthians 1:11).

Jesus continues with the mission in Matthew 28 to include baptizing and teaching, actions that accompany making disciples. The foundation is going and proclaiming Christ, that people might hear, believe, and be saved.

Questions for further thought and discussion:

- Based upon Jesus’ conditions for discipleship, what questions could be asked for a person to evaluate how seriously they are following Jesus?
- Since Jesus is not physically present to be followed, how should following Him look today?
- In what ways could a believer participate in making disciples of all nations? How are you participating?