



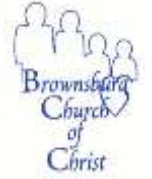
# Make Disciples

Brownsburg Church of Christ

by Edwin Crozier

March 13, 2011

AM Assembly



## Introduction:

It is hard to determine what things are most important to Jesus. Apart from Jesus just telling us, “This is what is most important,” most of our assessments actually say more about what is most important to us. Having said that, I think we can look at context clues and learn when some things are important to Him. For instance, in **Matthew 28:16-20**, Matthew presents one of the last conversations Jesus had with the 11 remaining disciples. In fact, Matthew presents it as the last conversation. Imagine if you had worked for three years with some people to send them out on a mission and you were having your final meeting with them. You were never going to speak to them face-to-face again. What kind of things would you say? Would you talk about trivial, unimportant matters? Or would you discuss issues that were of utmost importance to you and the mission with which you were charging them? The answer is obvious. Therefore, I think we can determine that Jesus’ command in **Matthew 28:18-20** is pretty close to the top of Jesus’ priorities for His disciples. Let’s consider these final words from Jesus and apply them to our work as His disciples.

## Discussion:

### I. Our job is to make disciples.

- A. What are we supposed to do? We are supposed to make disciples. This is the only command in these verses. The KJV says “teach,” but this is very different from the teaching described in **Matthew 28:20**. The words are actually completely different. The second word essentially means to instruct. This first one is the verb form of the word for “disciple.” Literally, we are commanded to disciple all nations. Or, make disciples of all nations.
- B. We need to clarify something that was said last week. Last week our brother Bob Buchanan said there was no biblical command for numerical growth. I’ve heard concern about that throughout the week. In fact, as soon as the service was over, I went to our good brother with this passage because it sounds to me like a pretty strong command for numerical growth. We had a good conversation and I want to clarify on his behalf so no one will misunderstand the point he was trying to make. Bob was pointing out that no command is given that says any given congregation has to have a larger membership each year. In other words, we have 228 members today. If by this time next year we have just 228 members, that won’t necessarily mean we have violated God’s commands. However, we are absolutely and without a doubt commanded to go out and save souls. We are commanded to make disciples. Granted, if we do that consistently, we will likely have more members and the congregation will grow numerically. But once we factor in those who move away, fall away, and die we may make new disciples and yet the congregation remains the same size. Additionally, we may have some brothers or sisters that we consider members who aren’t really disciples. We may successfully disciple them, but that won’t actually increase the numerical size of this congregation. Rest assured; brother Buchanan absolutely believes we must make disciples of all nations. His unending efforts both here in the USA and in foreign nations attest to that. So, please, don’t be confused. Not only does he believe that, he teaches that, he practices it, and we as a congregation will always stand on that principle. That is why we support Bob in his excellent work. Our job is to make disciples. We will not be satisfied with the number of disciples there are now, we will always strive for more both here and abroad.
- C. However, we need to recognize what we are making. Jesus does not say, “Go and baptize people.” He does not say, “Go and make church members.” He says, “Go and make disciples.” In the context of **Matthew**, a disciple was far more than someone who simply followed Jesus around and listened to Him teach.
  1. According to **Matthew 4:25-5:1**, there were great crowds that followed Jesus to hear Him teach. But, the disciples were distinct from those crowds. **Matthew 23:1** demonstrates the same point. A disciple is more than just a listener. A disciple is more than just a person who hears sermons, more than a church member.
  2. **Matthew 8:21-23** gives us a great picture of would-be discipleship and real discipleship. One who had become a disciple said he wanted to follow Jesus, but first he needed to bury his father. Jesus said he needed to leave the dead to bury their own and just follow Him. Then the next verse tells the real story. The real disciples actually followed Jesus into the boat no matter what else was going on.
  3. **Matthew 10:37-38** shows a picture of true discipleship as seen by the parallel in **Luke 14:26-27, 33**. A disciple is not someone who fits church attendance into his/her schedule. A disciple is someone who gives up everything to be with and follow Jesus Christ.

4. **Matthew 10:24-25** gets to the heart of the matter. A disciple is someone who is striving to be like his/her master. In fact, a disciple is only satisfied when he/she is like the master.

D. What are we trying to make? Disciples. We must take care not to convert people to baptism or even to this congregation. Instead, we are converting them to Christ. When we are done working with them, we want them to be like Christ, not like us. We must never lose sight of this goal. Jesus has commanded us to make disciples.

## II. Make disciples while going.

A. Now that we know what we are to do, when are we supposed to do it? I learned something completely new this week about **Matthew 28:19**. It involves Greek grammar and I know that can get a little tedious, but I encourage you to follow along. How many times have we heard someone say that **Matthew 28:19** commands us to GO? They then make a big deal about how inviting someone to a church's assembly isn't filling this command because we are asking them to come instead of us going. I've heard that a lot. But it just isn't true. There is only one command in this verse. The command is to make disciples.

B. You see, the Greek verb translated "Go," is actually a passive aorist participle. This means, it is not describing something we are being told to do. It is describing something that has already happened to us. Consider Young's Literal Translation of this verse: "Having gone, then, disciple all the nations..." In other words, Jesus is not commanding two actions. He is not commanding that we "go" in order to make disciples rather than "stay" or asking someone else to "come." He is actually just describing what happens to us. Going is something we do.

C. I think this may be the single greatest key in helping our congregation be a discipling congregation. Jesus is not telling us to "go" so that we can make disciples. Rather, He recognizes that going and having gone are natural parts of our lives. That is what our lives are filled with. We go to work. We go to school. We go to the store. We go to a party. We go to the bank. We go to a friend's house. We go home. We go out to eat. We go on vacation. We go on business trips. We go to the church's assembly. Going is just what we do all the time. Jesus' point is not that we "go" to make disciples, but that discipling is something we do while we are in the midst of all the going we do all the time. Our usual view of this verse compartmentalizes and weakens Jesus' real command. In the "go and make disciples" view, making disciples is something we do only when we "go" to do it. When we are not going in order to make disciples, we aren't thinking about discipling. I need to change my perspective. Discipling is not something we go and do. Discipling is something we do while we are doing all that other going.

D. Consider **Acts 8:1-4** as a great example of this. These Jerusalem Christians didn't travel as foreign missionaries. They didn't go in order to make disciples. But, having gone, what did they do? They made disciples. By contrast, consider the apostles in **John 4**. While Jesus rested by the well, the apostles went into Sychar to purchase food. They came back with food and nothing else. The woman at the well, however, came back with people for Jesus to teach. What happened here? The apostles had compartmentalized their discipling. They weren't going to make disciples in Sychar. They were going to buy food. Therefore, their eyes were closed to the opportunities.

E. Discipling includes but is not limited to conducting a Bible study. It is consciously thinking about how to influence folks to be like Christ. That includes being salt and light. It includes consciously setting an example in the Spirit's fruit. It includes developing relationships and friendships with people who need to be discipled. It includes turning a conversation to spiritual matters as opportunity arises. It includes talking to your children about Jesus. It includes praying for others. It includes inviting people to the church's assembly. It includes teaching in the church's assembly and classes. It includes greeting guests. It includes writing notes to guests. Looking through a discipler's eyes means not waiting to go and make disciples. It means having gone wherever you have gone, keep your eyes open for opportunities to disciple. Have you taken the kids to the park; how can you disciple someone (maybe even just your kids)? Are you on a business trip; how can you disciple someone? Have you invited friends over for dinner; how can you disciple them? Are you in a church's assembly; how can you disciple someone?

F. We have to look through disciplers' eyes. Wherever we are, we have gone there. Now that we have gone somewhere, how can we disciple someone?

## III. Make disciples of all nations.

A. We've answered the what and the when, now Jesus tells who. From what pool of people are we supposed to make these disciples? All nations. I can't help but wonder what the apostles thought when Jesus said this. They did not yet understand that Gentiles would be disciples as well. Yet, Jesus starts off by saying that they should make disciples of all nations. Perhaps they viewed this as going to the Jews that were dispersed among all the nations. But Jesus meant so much more than that. We are to make disciples of all people.

B. While this certainly includes the commission God gave the apostles to travel into all nations, the important part is about all nationalities, not traveling to each geographical location. They were not to exclude anyone from discipleship because of nationality no matter where they met them. For the apostles, this should have brought up the

Jew/Gentile distinction. For us, it goes deeper demonstrating that everyone is a prospect for discipleship. We shouldn't put up any barriers. It doesn't matter the color of their skin, their background, their education, their income, their politics, their dress, their hairstyle, their religious background, their culture. None of that matters. We must not put up barriers based on any of these but rather take the gospel to any and all. Everyone is a prospect.

- C. Peter finally learned this lesson and then passed it on to others in **Acts 10:34-35**. It doesn't matter who they are, if they will turn to Jesus, they can be a disciple.

#### IV. Make disciples by baptizing and teaching.

- A. Let's go back to an earlier statement. Jesus only gave one command in this passage. That command is to make disciples. He didn't command us to 1) go and 2) make disciples. Further, He didn't command us to 1) make disciples, 2) baptize them, and 3) teach them. Jesus did not tell the apostles to make disciples and then baptize and teach those disciples. Rather, having told them what to do, when to do it, and who to do it for, He then explained how to do it. How do we make disciples? By baptizing and teaching them.
- B. As said earlier, we need to remember our job. Our job is not to baptize people. Our job is to disciple them or to make disciples of them. However, in order to make someone a disciple, we must baptize them. It is a step in the process, not the goal. Please understand exactly what Jesus said. Jesus said that a person cannot possibly be a disciple without being baptized. Further, this isn't just any baptism. A person cannot possibly be a disciple without being baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. That doesn't mean we have to say that phrase while we baptize the person. Rather, it means we do it by God's authority. Jesus had said all authority was given to Him on heaven and on earth (**Matthew 28:18**). We know that authority was shared with the Father and the Spirit. We must baptize, but not just doing it any way we like. We must baptize with the baptism God has authorized. **Acts 2:38** demonstrates that baptism is for the remission of sins. **Acts 10:47-48** demonstrates that baptism is in water. **Acts 8:36, 38** demonstrates not only is the baptism in water, it also means going down into the water and coming up out of the water. As **Romans 6:4** demonstrates, it is a burial. Finally, **Colossians 2:11-14** demonstrates that this baptism is not about faith in our work of being baptized, but about faith in God's powerful working in baptism. Without this one baptism, no one can be a disciple of Jesus.
- C. But there is more. Not only must we baptize, we must teach. Jesus also said that a person cannot possibly be a disciple without being taught. Discipleship is not a warm fuzzy feeling. Discipleship is not a universal status. Discipleship is a response to teaching. At its most basic, "disciple" means learner. A person can't be a learner unless someone is teaching. But we need to remember that "disciple" is not a strictly Christian term. We can be disciples of anyone. People are only disciples of Christ when they are being taught to observe what Jesus has commanded. According to **Matthew 7:21-23**, people aren't disciples just because they call Jesus, "Lord." They are disciples when they are doing what He says. Further, **Matthew 15:1-9** demonstrates that people aren't disciples if they are following man's traditions but when they are observing God's commands. No wonder Paul instructed Timothy in **I Timothy 4:16**, "Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers" (ESV). Finally, recognize that discipleship is about observing the Lord's commands, not keeping our preferences. People are Jesus' disciples when they are doing what He says, not when they mirror our opinions on politics, social order, decorum, etc.
- D. I also can't help but notice the order of Jesus' statements. We know from **Romans 10:13-17** that someone will not be baptized unless they are first taught. But Jesus didn't say to disciple folks by teaching them and baptizing them. He said to do so by baptizing and teaching them. Why would He do that? The only conclusion I can draw is that discipling folks is not about getting them to the point of baptism. It is about getting them to be like Christ. While baptism based on the teaching they have already received is what initiates them into actual discipleship, they have a lifetime of growing to do which will only happen through more and more teaching. So, remember that just because you have baptized someone doesn't mean you are done discipling them. Keep teaching. Too many churches practice the two step process of dunk 'em and drop 'em. "Oh, they've been baptized. They're a disciple now. I can move on." No, discipling continues throughout all of life.

#### V. Jesus will be with us while we make disciples.

- A. I don't know about you, but I'm kind of scared about this. What if people reject me? What if I work really hard and no one ever becomes a disciple? What if I get someone mad at me? What if someone asks me a question I don't know the answer to? I'm nervous about visiting our guests. I'm nervous about inviting someone to church. I'm nervous about bringing up spiritual issues in casual conversation. How on earth can I overcome all this fear?
- B. Jesus anticipated that fear and said, "And behold, I am with you always..." (**Matthew 28:20**, ESV). Sometimes I can be like Moses in **Exodus 4:10-12**. Moses essentially said, "I can't do this, Lord. I'm a terrible speaker. I'm not very comfortable with this because of my verbal limitations." And God explained that He made Moses' mouth and would be with it. Moses could accomplish this because God's hand was with Him. I am like that sometimes. I

can stand up here and preach sermons all day long. I can say whatever needs to be said in a sermon, no matter how much I think it is going to upset folks. But ask me to look through a discipler's eyes and turn a water-cooler conversation to something spiritual and my knees begin to knock. Ask me to look through a discipler's eyes and invite my neighbor to an assembly and my mouth begins to cotton. Ask me to look through a discipler's eyes and hand an invitation card to a checkout clerk and my limbs begin to tremble. I don't know why. It just happens. I want to say to God, "Don't ever ask me to do that, I'm not any good at it." Jesus is saying, "I'm with you." I am convinced that as we grow in that faith, our fears will dissipate. Or if not, we will at least be able to walk through them. After all, when I'm anchored in my faith that Jesus is with me, if my friends leave me, I still have Jesus. If my neighbors ostracize me, I still have Jesus. If my family kicks me out, I still have Jesus as my brother. If something crazy happens and they start persecuting me and I end up dead, that just means I get to go be with Jesus.

- C. Jesus is with us, which means we can't fail. Oh, don't misunderstand. I don't mean that because Jesus is with us everyone we try to disciple will accept it. What I mean is since Jesus is with us, we can grow to do all that He wants us to. We can grow to look through disciplers' eyes and we can start viewing wherever we go as an opportunity to disciple someone. We will get better and better at that. But it will all only start when we remember that Jesus really is with us. And if He is with us, who can be against us?

#### Conclusion:

What's our job? Make disciples. When do we do it? Whenever we've gone somewhere. Who do we make disciples? Everybody we can without making barriers. How do we do it? By baptizing and teaching. Why will we have success? Because Jesus Christ, the Lord of heaven and earth, is with us. Praise God. Let's make disciples.