

Making Disciples

The following are some of the last words of Jesus Christ on earth: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matt 28.18-20). This is often called the Great Commission. It is this commission given by Jesus that sets the agenda for the church. Our agenda is to make disciples of Christ and to do so throughout the world. In thinking about this commission, I want to look at the what, the how, and the why of discipleship.

First, what does it mean to make disciples? Well, Jesus tells us. He said we are to make disciples by baptizing them in the name of the Triune God and by teaching them everything Jesus has commanded us. Thus, to make a disciple means we baptize them (which speaks of their initial commitment to Christ) and then we teach them (which refers to their lifelong conformity to Christ). It is not enough to baptize new converts. We must then focus on teaching them how to live the Christian life. And this is not simply the responsibility of the Pastor. Speaking to the whole congregation, Paul said, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom” (Col 3.16). Not all teaching takes place behind the pulpit. A word of instruction in the hallway or over the phone may make the difference in someone’s life.

Secondly, how can we make disciples? What I mean by this is how can we as frail, fallible people expect to make disciples of the nations? How are we going to accomplish this mission? Again, Jesus tells us. He sandwiches the commission with two words of assurance. First, he says, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (vs 18), and then he says, “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (vs 20). In light of Christ’s supreme authority and with the assurance of his abiding Presence, we go forth to make disciples of all nations. Just think this commission was originally given to a simple band of fishermen and common folks. Yet, through Christ they transformed the world. Never underestimate what Christ can do with and through a group of Christians that are fully dedicated to him.

Lastly, why should we make disciples? Why should we make this our number one priority in the church? Some churches don't. Some churches are so caught up with various activities that they forget that the main thing is making disciples. Why is this? Making disciples requires effort and commitment. It's one thing to lead a person to Christ; it's another thing to help him or her grow up in all things in Christ. Yet, it's worth it! Robert Coleman once wrote, "Better to give a year or so to one or two men who learn what it means to conquer for Christ than to spend a lifetime with a congregation just keeping the program going" (*The Master Plan of Evangelism*, p. 117). The fact is: if we fail at making disciples, we fail in the central area of our commission as God's people. So let us go forth and invest in another's person's life for Christ's sake.