

Going For Christ Matthew 28:18-20

When Jesus ascended to heaven after His mission on earth, as the fable goes, the angels asked Him if He had accomplished His task. The Lord answered that it was all finished having paid for the sins of the world. The angels then asked if the whole world had heard about Him. Christ said that not all had yet heard about His sacrifice and plan to save them. The angels wondered what His plan was. He explained that He had left 12 men and some other followers to carry the message to the whole world. The angels then asked if that plan didn't work, did He have a plan B? Jesus told them that there was no plan B.

God's plan has always been and still remains for the followers of Jesus to reach people with the gospel of Jesus Christ. He planned the means by which it would be accomplished, and that plan includes you and me. Now the means by which we do that varies. It may be through evangelistic campaigns, one on one evangelism, tracts, the internet, songs, Bible distributions, and other Christian books.

We are on a four-week journey of reviewing our mission as a church. **Why are we here at 2500 Hartland Rd. in Hartland, Michigan? What is the purpose for our existence?**

Let's review again both our purpose and mission statements found in our church's constitution.

Purpose: Fellowship Bible Church is organized specifically for the God-honoring purpose of the edification of believers from God's Holy Word, the Bible, the evangelism of non-believers through the Gospel of God's saving grace, and the fellowship of its members through worship, preaching/teaching, and Christ-centered activities.

We are a church committed to the purpose of maturing believers and evangelizing non-believers and we do so through a thorough study of the Bible. From our purpose we have established a mission by which everything we do should be filtered. This mission is the governing statement that guides our actions as a church. Our mission is as follows:
Gathering with Christ, Growing in Christ, Going

for Christ, Giving to Christ.

As I mentioned last week, if I were to add a fifth statement, it would be that everything we do – gathering, growing, going, and giving – should be done for **the glory of Christ**. That is our ultimate purpose.

Today we come to the third point of our mission and what may be the most challenging – **going for Christ**. Please turn in your Bibles to **Matthew 28:18-20**. Called the Great Commission, it is the marching orders of every believer, the last word of instruction given by Jesus to His followers to be seekers of the lost in order for them to be saved and become like Christ in character. Or as He described to Peter in His invitation to come and follow Him that we might become a fisher of men.

Born in 1700, Count Zinzendorf would become a prominent and outspoken voice for Christianity in Germany. Among the things he is noted for, he established what came to be known as The Order of the Mustardseed. According to historical records, **“they saw their society as a kind of spiritual order of knighthood, dedicated not to personal honor or self-advancement but to radical service of Jesus Christ the King. The rules of their order morphed and matured as they grew, but the heart of their promise always remained the same:**

1. To be true to Christ
2. To be kind to people
3. To take the Gospel to the nations

Their aspiration to take the ‘Gospel to the nations’ was the greatest missions movement of its time. This third vow inspired Zinzendorf to begin sending out missionaries from Herrnhut to the ends of the earth. These early Moravian pioneers were the first ‘lay’ missionaries and the first to be sent by a non state-sponsored organization.”

Like them, our passage compels us, even commissions us as followers of Christ to take the Gospel to all people. Unfortunately, sharing the gospel is often like these **two cartoons**.

In the report from our recent survey, two of the twelve characteristics of a healthy church are

outreach and evangelism and community engagement.

Outreach and evangelism refers to reaching out to others in word and deed by showing and sharing the good news.

Community engagement refers to intentionally embracing our community to transform it with the love of Christ.

Two important truths were expressed from the input by those who filled out the survey. Not surprising is that we have a robust foreign missions program. Most of the individuals and organizations we support are focused on reaching people in other nations. The challenge that we as a church face is having as strong a connection and commitment to reaching those in our community with the gospel. The question to address as a church is how or what can we do to reach our community for Christ? Of those who filled out the survey, 80% said that lack of community outreach was a challenge or concern.

Are we willing to commit to the mission of going for Christ to reach our community? If so, what part can each of us have as part of this local church to pursue this important part of our mission?

With your Bibles open, let's consider first our participation in going with the gospel.

I. OUR PARTICIPATION IN GOING WITH THE GOSPEL

This commission is given to every believer and therefore every local church. It's part of our purpose as Christians. In fulfilling this purpose, every church will do it differently than the church down the street, but the focus is the same – to reach the community with the gospel, but the means to achieve it will be different.

Some may do so through VBS or other similar ministries. Others may do so through food or clothing distribution. Others may have an addictions recovery ministry or other type of support group with a Christ-centered focus.

The point is, we have all been commissioned to be actively involved in sharing the gospel.

To commission someone is an instruction, duty or command given to a person or group of people. Another definition states that it is a group of people charged with a particular function. Still another says it is to give an order or to authorize.

We see in **verse 18** that all authority had been given to Jesus both in heaven and on earth.

John Piper writes: **“The courage to go, the audacity to make disciples for Jesus from followers of other lands and other religions, the authority to baptize in the name of the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are all based on the rock solid foundation of the words — and the reality — “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”**

Let's be clear that Jesus did not claim this authority on His own. He did not usurp this position or take it by force for Himself. He states that this authority both in heaven, the realm we cannot see, and on earth, the realm we can see, were given to Him. It's implied that the bequeathing of this authority came from God as we see from the following passages.

Matthew 11:27 “All things have been handed over to me by My Father.”

John 3:35 “The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand.”

John 13:3 “Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going back to God . . . knelt down and washed the apostles' feet.

John 17:2 “Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son that the Son may glorify You, since You have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom You have given Him.”

Ephesians 1:20-21 “God raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.”

The word authority used here is the same word used in **John 1:12** where each person who believes has been given the power or right to become children of

God. With the passages we just read, the word used in **Matthew 28:18**, means that Jesus has been given the right or power to rule in heaven and on earth. With that authority given by the Father, He has commissioned each one of us as His ambassadors to carry on the task of sharing the gospel.

John Piper gives three compelling reasons why this authority given to Jesus is important.

1. His authority unleashes a torrent of hope-filled prayer for God in Christ to do what only He can do: send workers and save sinners.

Romans 10:1 “It is my heart’s desire and prayer to God that they may be saved.”

We pray with the hope that Jesus will save those for whom we are praying. We pray that He would remove their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh to respond to the gospel and be saved. We pray that the veil covering their blind eyes would be removed so they can see with eyes of faith.

May the Lord give us strong hope in His authority as we pray for friends and loved ones to find the Savior as we share about the hope that is in us.

2. His authority unleashes hope-filled, bold and joyful evangelism, even among those in the world who are most difficult to reach with the gospel.

No heart is beyond the ability of Christ to reach and save and we are called by God to work alongside Him in doing what we can to live the gospel and share the gospel.

Acts 26:15-18

What Jesus said to Paul, He says to us. By His authority, He is calling each of us to participate in the proclamation of the gospel.

3. His authority unleashes the potential of many to leave their homes and go to places of greater need where the gospel is absent.

Jesus’ authority frees us us to go. We don’t go in our own authority or even in our own power.

II. OUR POWER IN GOING WITH THE GOSPEL – v. 20

“I am with you.”

But you might say “How is Jesus with us? He left and went to back to heaven.”

John 14:15-17, 25-27

John 20:21-22a “Again Jesus said, ‘Peace be with you! As the Father has sent Me, I am sending you.’ And with that He breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’”

The presence of Jesus is with us through the Holy Spirit who indwells every believer so that when we go, we go not only with His authority to speak on His behalf, but in His power through the Holy Spirit.

Acts 1:8

Romans 15:17-20

I Corinthians 2:1-5

The power to witness comes from the Holy Spirit. When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he told them that he didn’t come with fancy words or persuasive speech. He didn’t come to them with flashy gimmicks. He simply came in the power of God’s Spirit to proclaim the truth of the gospel.

When I say I can’t witness, I’m denying the power given to me by God to do the very thing He has commissioned me to do. When I say I can’t witness, I am disobeying His command.

Many years ago there was a lawyer in St. Louis who visited a client to conduct some business. The client happened to be a Christian. Before they parted company, the client said to the lawyer that he had always wanted to ask a question but was afraid. The lawyer wondered what the client had on his mind. The client asked why he had never become a Christian. The lawyer hung his head and said that he knew enough of the Bible to realize that it says that no drunkard can enter the kingdom of God. The client said he was avoiding the question. The lawyer then said that no one had ever told him how he could become a Christian. Picking up his Bible, the man read Scripture that showed how everyone is under condemnation for sin, but that Jesus came to save the lost by dying on the cross for their sins, but that a person who receives Christ as his substitute and Redeemer can be forgiven and saved. He then invited the lawyer to trust Christ in prayer. Right then and there the man was saved. The lawyer was

C.I. Scofield who edited the reference Bible that bears his name.

We never know what plans God has for His kingdom when we share the gospel. We have the power to go with the gospel. But our aim shouldn't merely to share the gospel with those we might think will be big players on God's team. Our purpose is to share the gospel that they might become part of God's forever family regardless of the part they have in the body of Christ.

Jesus didn't withhold an invitation to the thief on the cross next to Him just because he was about to die having no occasion to impact others for eternity. On the other hand, I believe that his story has touched many since then to show us that it is never too late to trust Christ, even when someone is close to death. Let's determine to go in the power of the Spirit. Now, that doesn't mean we shouldn't have a plan when we share the gospel.

Pray

Prepare

Plan

Proclaim

Charles Ryrie says that only in [God's] power can we perform the Great Commission.

We need to study the Scriptures to help us when we share the gospel. What then, is our plan in going with the gospel, but before we go there, let's talk about our purpose in going with the gospel.

III. OUR PURPOSE IN GOING WITH THE GOSPEL – v. 19

The commission by Jesus is to make disciples. That is the only command in the passage. Going, baptizing and teaching are the actions that result from making disciples. It's the outline given by Jesus by which we fulfill the Great Commission. We make disciples by going, baptizing, and teaching them to obey the commands of Jesus.

A disciple is someone who receives instruction from someone else. In that era, a person would attach themselves to a teacher in order to learn from them. They would travel with them, eat with them,

observe them, listen to them, model them. In essence, a disciple was a learner who wanted to become like the teacher. When we make disciples, we are helping them become like Christ in character. Evangelism isn't just about helping them understand how they can be saved, it is also helping them grow in Christ.

Dawson Trottman, founder of the Navigators, tells about his early efforts at evangelism. He recalls picking up a hitchhiker in a rainstorm. The person got in the car using very colorful metaphors about the weather. If you don't know what that means, he was swearing like a sailor. Trottman shared the gospel and the person trusted Christ as Savior. A year later he was driving on the same road and saw a hitchhiker. He pulled over to pick him up and the guy hopped in using foul language. Trottman realized it was the same guy from a year earlier. He understood right then that it's not enough to share the gospel and lead someone to Christ, the person also needs to grow in Christ, to be discipled, to help them grow in Christ likeness and so was born the vision for the Navigators used by many people in fulfilling the purpose of making disciples.

Our commission is to teach people to obey Christ in their everyday lives. Hence, the second part of our mission to grow in Christ. Our purpose is clear – make disciples. **What then is our plan?**

IV. OUR PLAN IN GOING WITH THE GOSPEL

If we don't know our purpose, we won't have a plan. The plan Jesus laid was first to go. We can't expect people to just enter our doors and say, I'm here, what do I need to do to be saved. We are to be the spiritual guides for the blind, going to them and pointing them through our testimony and our teaching why they need to be saved, showing them how to be saved.

Acts 8:26-40 (Story of Philip and the Ethiopian)

Philip relied on the leading of the Spirit and spoke in the power of the Spirit to teach the man what he needed to know to be saved. He asked a simple question: Do you know what you're reading?

A friend of mine used his Scripture memory to be a lead in for sharing the gospel. As a student at Penn State, he would walk up to another student and say that he was working on memorizing something and wondered if he would check to see if he had it right. He would quote the verse and then ask what the other person thought it meant.

When Uncle Johnnie was in the hospital one time, he had a roommate. When visitors would come to see him, he would ask them to read certain passages from his Bible. The person would read the Scripture and Uncle Johnnie would say “oh that’s a good one.” Then he’d ask the person to read another verse and he’d say, “oh that’s a dandy, I like that.” The verses were the plan of salvation read out loud so the roommate could hear.

There are a lot of different ways to share the gospel, but if we don’t have a plan, we generally won’t.

There are a lot of resources available if we aren’t sure what to do or where to start.

Pastor Jim is leading a class on evangelism using the book *Will My Generation Speak?*.

In the past I’ve led classes using a book titled *Becoming A Courageous Christian*.

Dr. D. James Kennedy wrote *Evangelism Explosion*. He developed his approach to witnessing while sharing the gospel on beaches. He came up with the lead in question: if you were to die today and stand before God and He were to say to you why should I let you into My heaven, what would you say to Him?

Bill Bright wrote the Four Spiritual Laws. The Navigators have the Bridge to Life illustration. They also have some great books and articles to help you develop in witnessing.

We have a number of different tracts in the foyer. CEF developed the wordless book. They have training material as well.

There are oodles of materials to help develop the skills that God’s Spirit can use to empower you to share the gospel. There is no excuse for not having a plan. **So where are we to go with the gospel?**

V. OUR PLACES IN GOING WITH THE GOSPEL – v. 19

“Go and make disciples of all nations.”

Acts 1:8 “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Simply put, we take the gospel everywhere we go. The book of Acts shows us that evangelism started in Jerusalem, then moved throughout Judea and into Samaria eventually spreading to the known world. We can liken that to our neighborhood or city, our State, our country and then to the world.

Most of the time sharing the gospel is with people we know – family, friends, neighbors (who you hope are friends), co-workers or classmates. Some people have the ability to talk to complete strangers.

The point is, as Peter explains **“But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do so with gentleness and respect.” (I Peter 3:15)**

Don’t be like the guy I heard about who would go up to students on campus, light a match and stick it under their nose and say “turn or burn.” We are to share the gospel with tact and gentleness. The point being that wherever you go, be prepared at the prompting of the Spirit to share about Christ.

Jesus also speaks about the persistence in going with the gospel.

VI. OUR PERSISTENCE IN GOING WITH THE GOSPEL – v. 18, 20

“Go make disciples...to the very end of the age.”

That literally reads “in your going, in your baptizing, in your teaching.” In other words, it is a continuous action, something that we are to keep on doing. **But for how long?** Jesus tells us the persistence or duration of our making disciples is to be a continuous action of making disciples until the end of the age. In other words, He says, don’t stop

till He returns. No matter how daunting the task, no matter how difficult the task, no matter how discouraging it may be, even no matter how dangerous it may be – go make disciples. Let’s take courage from those in persecuted countries who risk their lives every day to be a witness. Be persistent in going with the gospel.

Jesus gives one more reason for His commission to obey making disciples. He speaks about our promise in going with the gospel.

VII. OUR PROMISE IN GOING WITH THE GOSPEL – v. 20

“I am with you always.”

Jesus will never abandon us when we go and proclaim the good news of salvation.

Alistair Begg writes “Christ’s call for us to share the reason for the hope that is in us is not different for us today than it was for His disciples then. We are surrounded by death, despair, emptiness, regret, and fear. All the time, we peer into an unknown future. Those in our circles of influence need to know that only in Jesus can they find pardon and peace. Praise God that His Spirit goes before us. What would change in your words to others if you knew you were sent to them by divine appointment as part of a divine mission? “‘As the Father has sent Me,’ says Jesus, ‘even so I am sending you.’”

Someone has said that “it is easy to determine when something is aflame. It ignites other material. Any fire that does not spread will eventually go out. A church without evangelism is a contradiction in terms, just as a fire that does not burn is a contradiction.”

Sam Shoemaker who was an Episcopalian bishop, summed up the situation this way by saying: “In the Great Commission the Lord has called us to be – like Peter – fishers of men. We’ve turned the commission around so that we have become merely keepers of the aquarium. Occasionally I take some fish out of your fishbowl and put them into mine, and you do the same with my bowl. But we’re all tending the same fish.” What he means is that the

ebb and flow of church growth is largely from people changing churches rather than growing through evangelism.

The *Times-Reporter* of New Philadelphia, Ohio, reported in September 1985 a celebration of a New Orleans municipal pool. The party around the pool was held to celebrate the first summer in memory without a drowning at the city pool. In honor of the occasion, 200 people gathered, including 100 certified lifeguards. As the party was breaking up and the four lifeguards on duty began to clear the pool, they found a fully dressed body in the deep end. They tried to revive the 31-year-old victim, but it was too late. He had drowned surrounded by lifeguards celebrating their successful season.

How many are dying without Christ because I am, we are afraid to share the gospel even though we have the message that can help them avoid eternal death? We are all certified life savers with the gospel message. It doesn’t matter our skill level or how long or short we have been saved. We are commissioned with the task of making disciples.

My youngest brother was in kindergarten when he asked Jesus to be his Savior. He was so excited that the next day he took a little Gideon Testament on the bus with him. Now mind you, he couldn’t read yet, but he used it to share with his friend how he too could be saved.

Our mission is to go for Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit to proclaim the gospel to people who otherwise would be lost for eternity separated for eternity from the joy and peace of God’s presence. We have the message of hope for them not just for eternity, but a peace and joy they can experience now. We are all to be involved in making disciples in our community, our State, our country, our world by going for Christ. We are His ambassadors.

When Bill Gothard attended High school in Chicago, he committed to sharing the gospel with all the students. He started with his freshman class. He was able to get all the names and addresses along with all the birthdays of his classmates. He sent a birthday card to each classmate and in it

shared the gospel. By his senior year he had shared the gospel with every person in his school.

Romans 10:9-15 “But what does it say? ‘The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,’ that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim: If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. As Scripture says, ‘Anyone who believes in Him will never be put to shame.’ For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on Him, for, ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’ How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’”

With your heads bowed and eyes closed, I’m wondering who might be challenged to take this commission given by Jesus and begin praying about how you might be used to go make disciples. Maybe it’s writing down the names of five people and committing to pray for them, not just that they would be saved, but how you might have opportunity to share the gospel with them.

Maybe it’s looking for opportunities in the community where you can be involved that would provide a place to share the gospel.

Maybe it’s hosting a Bible study where unsaved friends can explore and ask questions about what it means to be a Christian.

Maybe it’s getting the names and birthdays or anniversaries of people in your neighborhood and sending them a card with the gospel.

If you have lots of kids in your neighborhood, maybe it’s hosting a 5-Day club. All you have to do is open your home and CEF will do the teaching.

There are lots of ways that we can go for Christ. Let’s have beautiful feet going for Christ.

If the Lord has laid that on your heart to begin today to do your part in fulfilling the Great Commission, would you raise your hand so I can pray for you?