

# "What Business Are We In?"

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**Matthew 28:16-20**

This passage records Jesus' last words to his disciples. I once visited a church on vacation that placed this verse at the center of their ministry. In fact, up in front of the sanctuary they had an enormous banner that read, "His Last Command, Our First Command." A number of you probably know this text as the Great Commission passage. (commission = sending people off with a mission, with specific marching orders) Though this passage is fairly well known, it is also fairly well misunderstood.

Let's take a look: Matt. 28:16-20

*Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore 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 that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

I'd like to speak to you this morning on the subject, "What 'Business' are we in?" Think of the word 'Business' in quotes of course, because we are not a business. There are a number of aspects of our church where we utilize sound business practices, but that does not mean that we are a business. You can take a walk in the woods in Maine, but that doesn't make you a moose. We're not a business.

So when I ask the question, What Business are we in? I really mean, "What are we all about? What are we trying to accomplish? What is the job of the church? What is the church's calling? We talk about individuals

having a call from God - but what is the church called by God to do? What in God's Name are we here for? These are important questions for us because sometimes we forget and even lose our focus.

It's a little like the nurse I heard about who had been doing her job for a long, long time, and she was a little burned out to say the least. She worked for a doctor's office, and often was the first person people saw when they entered the office. One day a man came into the office and said, "I'm having migraines and I just need some stronger pain medicine." She said, "Go into room, take off your clothes and put on the hospital gown." "But I just have a headache." "Go into room, take off your clothes and put on the hospital gown. Do it!" she commanded!

By now the man was afraid and so he did as she said. He went into the room and started removing his clothes when he saw another man in the room cowering down behind the examination bed. This other man was also in a hospital gown. The first man said, "I can't believe she sent me in here. All I have is a headache." The man kneeling down behind the bed replied, "You think you're in trouble, I just walked in to read the meter!"

Sometimes we lose our focus and forget what we're all about. Jesus, our Teacher, had some famous last words for his disciples - *"Go into all the world and make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son & Holy, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commended you."*

Please note the presence of the Trinity - *"baptize them in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit."* One more proof that Dan Brown way off base (and intellectually dishonest) in The Da Vinci Code when he says the bishops in the 4th Century invented the Trinity. Here it is in Matthew's First Century gospel.

But equally important than that is the church marching orders - "Go and make disciples." Most people see this as strictly an evangelistic verse - "Go out into the world, preach the gospel, and get more people signed up for the team. Go out, share the gospel, be 'fishers of men,' and get more people in the boat for God's sake." Isn't that how we usually see this passage? And that is partly right.

But it doesn't say, "Go out and get more members." It doesn't say - "Go out and proclaim the faith, so that more people believe the right stuff." It says, "Make Disciples." Be about the task of training, equipping, producing and reproducing followers of Jesus. Not just people who believe the right stuff, but rather people who have joined their hearts and souls

and lives to Christ, and are seeking with all their hearts to live with God and for God. "Make disciples" says Jesus. The church's calling is to produce people who live like Christ. They don't just believe that Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life - they're actually living out his ways, his truth and his life.

Dallas Willard is a very challenging author within Christianity, and he's written a book entitled, The Great Omission. Willard says that when it comes to Matthew 28, the Great Commission, the church has missed the boat. Jesus didn't say, "Go out and get more people to believe that I exist." He said, "Go out and train people to live as I live, to love as I love, to care as I care, to see as I see. . . Go out and make followers, doers."

Dallas Willard says a Disciple is "a learner, a student, an apprentice, a practitioner, even if only a beginner." "Disciples of Jesus are people who do not just profess certain views as their own but apply their growing understanding of life in the Kingdom of the Heavens to every aspect of their life here on earth." (p. xi)

My pastor used to tell the story of a conversation he overheard at the town diner where we lived. The waitresses were teasing the manager of the store. "Well, you're the boss," they said. To which the boss replied, "Why do you call me the boss when you never do what I say?" Jesus said, "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46)

Dallas Willard (p. 23) tells about something that happened to him that made this point so crystal clear to him. Dallas and his family were living in the inner city and there was a house across the street from him where people did drugs and even bought and sold the drugs. Sometimes he would even see them sitting on the porch shooting up. He describes it this experience:

*"As I brooded over them one day, indulging my irritation, the Lord helped me see that I really had no love for them at all, that after 'suffering' from them for several years I would secretly be happy if they died so that we could just be rid of them. I realized how little I truly cared for nearly all the people I dealt with through the day . . . I had to admit that I had never earnestly sought to be possessed by God's kind of love, to become more like Jesus. Now it was time to seek."*

That's the start of becoming an apprentice of Jesus - striving to live as

he lived and love as he loves. It's one thing to say, "If Jesus were here, he would love those people. I believe that's true." That's believing all the right stuff. But to be a follower of Jesus, a practitioner of his ways, we need to actually try to do it - to actually walk across the street and strive to love "those people," whoever they may be.

The business of the church is not simply to maintain an institution, balance a budget, care for historic buildings, or even just make "converts" who believe all the right doctrine. We can have all those things and still miss our calling. The business of the church is to produce people who live like Christ. It's a tall order. We'll always just be apprentices, not Masters. There's only one Master and that's Jesus Christ. But our calling, our job on these grounds and in these buildings is to help people live like Christ - because that's what a disciple does.

So let's remember the sacred, holy work that we are about - spiritual formation, shaping little lives and big lives more and more into the image of Jesus Christ our Lord.

*"His Last Command, Our First Command."*

To make disciples, Apprentices of Jesus, who live like the Master.

Think about it.