

MISSIONS: MAKING DISCIPLES

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There is a misconception that missions is reserved for a particular group of believers who have received callings from the Lord. The rest of us are called to something else. Not all of us will indeed be called to do missionary work that intensively reaches out to unbelievers. However, there is a fundamental calling for every disciple of Jesus Christ, which is written in the Gospel of Matthew - The Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20).

This familiar passage is a message not only to the missionaries, but also a command for all disciples of Jesus Christ. One has to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, who shows absolute commitment to the Lord as one's sole Master and Lord, to execute this command.

The background of this mission begins in the Old Testament. In one of my seminary courses at Tyndale University, Dr. James Padler, who teaches a course on the study of the Church, demonstrated that the Church is rooted in God's mission. I modified one of his lecture slides with my own emphasis on the following sentences:

In the beginning, God created the world and gave humanity a role to steward his creation. However, human sins destroyed the relationships between God, humanity, and creation. Then, God chose Abraham and his descendants to be an instrument of restoration and blessing for all nations. This selected group of people must reflect God's holiness in their lives together. The center of God's mission is the incarnation, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. Christ fulfilled the covenant that God made with Abraham, becoming the source of the new humanity and the new creation—the actual image of God. We, as part of the faith community who are in Christ and being restored to the image of God and called to act on God's behalf in God's world, are God's instrument for the blessing of God's creation, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to proclaim and embody the gospel. God's mission will be complete in the new creation, where we reign with Christ in the new heavens and new earth.

Within this mega-narrative, we are a group of people living in a time when Jesus Christ has fulfilled the promises God made to the patriarchs. Thus, we are called to be the instruments of proclamation and the embodiment of the gospel with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Now that we know the background of this God's mission, we can begin to examine the Great Commission. What does it say about what a disciple of Jesus Christ must do?

When we think of the Great Commission, we usually associate it with going on a mission trip to a foreign place far from home. There you would live minimally, engage with the locals daily, and invite them to gatherings where you would get to know them. During the process, you would share the gospel and your testimony as often as possible. After the trip, the person would typically share their transformative experience with supporters and members of their home church. If there is no continual inspiration in engaging in this kind of work, that person would usually return to their everyday life at home and in the church.

That being said, I am not generalizing everyone's experience, nor evoking guilt in people who have been on mission trips but did not pursue a career in a Christian profession. However, my observation is that we are rarely informed about the mission of a disciple of Jesus Christ, and many of us may not have the time to study the Great Commission and apply it to our lives.

This command that Jesus Christ has left us in the Great Commission is indeed for every disciple of Jesus Christ. First, we must understand that the risen Christ has all authority in heaven and on earth. On one hand, Jesus Christ has been given all authority, glory, and power by God. On the other hand, he will "provide for us the example of life, the guidance of his words and the supply of his power" so that we can be continually transformed from the inside out to respond to this command.

With the authority that God has given to Jesus Christ, we who are called and restored in the image of God will have the power and resources to respond to this command. Most of us would respond by going on a mission trip. It is because it seems like 'going' is the first verb that comes up in most of our English translations. If we look closer in the original language, "to make a disciple" is, however, the main command, whereas the other three actions are describing how we are to make disciples. The process of making a disciple involves going, baptizing, and teaching.

In September, our church held a baptismal ceremony. This is a ceremony where the new disciples make claims to identify themselves with Jesus and his faith community, and declare publicly that they have become lifelong followers of Jesus. It is also a ceremony in which a new disciple transfers their life ownership to the ownership of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the process of making disciples, we approach a person who is interested in hearing the gospel. Then that person commits to Jesus by publicly declaring their allegiance to the Lord. Next, we will teach them what it means to be a Christ follower in our everyday lives.

This teaching involves discipleship and the discipling process. Discipleship is the process by which a Christian is transformed into a mature follower of Christ. The Holy Spirit guides and shapes the person gradually to become like Christ. In this process, we yield our obedience to all that Jesus commanded. The discipling process, on the other hand, is “the involvement of one disciple helping another grow in his or her discipleship.” This implies that we also have the responsibility to help one another grow as disciples. Wilkins shows how the more mature disciples are to help the new disciples grow in their faith:

“More mature disciples must teach other disciples how to obey all that Jesus commanded. The community of disciples looks within itself to provide concrete examples, compassionate encouragement, and structured and informal teaching of Jesus’ life and words, in the process of teaching other disciples how to obey all that Jesus commanded.” (Michael J. Wilkins, Matthew., 1003.)

Therefore, there is a corporate aspect to this process of becoming disciples of Jesus Christ, in addition to our personal relationship with the Lord as our master. We need the community of faith—the people of God — to help us and one another become obedient disciples of Jesus Christ.

Let us not forget that Jesus Christ is always present in this process of discipleship and discipling. Wilkins reminds us that there are four ways that Jesus is present in our faith. First, He is present when we share the gospel and extend invitations to people to become his disciples. He is also present when the new disciples are being baptized and taught to obey all that Jesus commands. For those who are mature in faith, Jesus Christ is present throughout all the stages of life. Ultimately, for the entire church, Jesus is present as we journey through this age, awaiting His return.

Let our Lord Jesus Christ and His Holy Spirit lead you throughout the week. Starting on Sunday, as the beginning of the week, we worship and encounter God in the sanctuary as a people of God, seeking to build our corporate identity as His people. From Monday to Saturday, as God’s people, we witness God’s transformative power in our everyday activities and the challenges we face. Our Christian activities, such as fellowship, Bible study, prayer meetings, casual meet-ups, and meals together, reflect our identity in Christ. Without making Jesus Christ the center of our Christian life, it is difficult to follow the commands that Jesus taught in the Bible, because we lack the power to do so.

Last but not least, the mission is not exclusively for someone who is explicitly called to the mission fields, but is for every disciple of Christ Jesus who continues Jesus’ mission while he was on earth, in calling people to repent because God’s kingdom is here and to strive in becoming more and more Christ’s like with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Zion Mission Committee

Zion Mission Committee primarily supports Zion Alliance Church in facilitating missions related administration. One of the major tasks is to devise the missions yearly budget in providing monetary support to the missions activities for the following entities: the Christian & Missionary Alliance, the Eastern Canadian District of C&MA, the Canadian Chinese Alliance Churches Association, Zion Alliance Church’s in-house missionaries and short-term missions, missions related trainings and conferences, and other missions organizations. The committee also hosts educational classes about God’s mission and the task of missions, relays updates of Zion Alliance Church’s in-house missionaries, and promotes mission conferences and local/overseas mission opportunities. In short, the committee aims to encourage fellow Christ followers to actively participate in God’s mission locally and globally.



Group picture:

(left 1) Joel Lam, (left 2) Maggie Ng,
(right 1) Jackson Chan, (right 2) Shiu Chin Ho,
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