Introduction to Commissioned

Matthew 28:18-20; Matthew 16:24

Application – Our mission is to lead our neighbors and the nations to follow Jesus.

Introduction

Think about this for a minute. Who do you know that is following Jesus? Class assignment: take a few minutes to think about this question. Have each class member name at least one person who they believe is following Jesus. Then ask the follow up questions: How did this person become a follower of Jesus? What habits do they have that reveal them to be followers of Jesus? What steps are they taking regularly to follow Jesus? What is one thing about his/her life that you would emulate if you could?

Jesus commissioned the church when he declared, “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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:1-20). No church really gets to define its own mission. Jesus has already done that. But each church has the unique responsibility to articulate the mission of Jesus Christ through its particular context and situation. We have been commissioned to follow Jesus and lead others to follow him.

Unfortunately, many Christians are not living with intentionality and clarity in following Jesus and leading others to follow him. Too many churches fail to recognize the disconnect between the lives of the Christians in their congregations and the mission of Christ. Too many churches provide little clarity as to how someone can become a follower of Jesus Christ. Too many churches have no plan in place for wanderers to become followers. While the Christian life is a journey, it is not a destination-less journey. Rather, it is a journey with a purpose—a journey with a mission. Followers of Jesus must not meander. We must take Christ’s commission seriously and follow him.

Jesus said in his Sermon on the Mount, “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few” (Matthew 7:13-14). Far too many Christians today merely exist. They are not on a road anywhere. The surest way to end up nowhere in particular is to never head anywhere on purpose. It is vital that we know where we are supposed to be going and that we take an intentional walk to get there.

To be *commissioned* means that we have been given a charge, an assignment, a challenge. And our commissioning did not just come from anyone—it came from the One—Jesus himself. In April of 2018, Wilkesboro Baptist Church affirmed the following mission statement—*Leading our neighbors and the nations to follow Jesus*. Essentially, our mission statement is Jesus’ Great Commission clarified for us today.

On any given Sunday across the US, especially in the South, men, women, boys and girls will get out of bed, dress up and arrive at similar brick buildings. From the outside, many church buildings look the same—stained glass, steeples, parking lots, large doors, and signs. Often the inside of the building is little different as well. There are hallways with classrooms and meeting rooms. There are offices, bathrooms and most common of all a sanctuary. Sanctuaries are common enough. Many have pews, some have chairs. Many have high ceilings, most have pulpits. Some even have those blackboard score charts hanging in the sanctuary with categories like: worship attendance, Sunday school attendance, training union attendance, and offering. At WBC, we have our own version of the blackboard score chart in our weekly newsletter,
the Beacon. In these church buildings on a Sunday morning, there will be music (all different styles), all different kinds of dress from casual to prim and proper, all different ages. There will almost always be an offering and a sermon. There is usually a time for Sunday school or Bible study or life groups. There is almost always a time for prayer. Many of these churches have mid-week activities and ministries. But for the pastors of these churches and many times the members, we try to examine the health and quality of the church. Just like many of us can look healthy on the outside, yet upon a doctor’s examination discover that we are sick on the inside, churches can be that way as well. We can look like things are ok—attendance is up or at least steady, giving is solid, people are happy, things are running smoothly. And in many cases we go from week to week, month to month, year to year, sermon after sermon, song after song, lesson after lesson thinking that we are doing “church.” Mostly, we think because we like it and others like it that we are doing church well. And so many churches across our land would give their church a big thumbs up.

But many of these “things” related to church are not necessarily the best indicators of the health and mission of our church.

- We are never commanded in the Bible to build sanctuaries or worship centers.
- We are never commanded to organize choirs or praise teams.
- We are never commanded to make sure our budget balances or that our spaces are comfortable.
- We are never commanded to keep people happy. Now, lest you think I’m being overly critical—these things are not bad. Nor should we reject them. But they cannot be our definitions of success and doing church well. Why? Because these other “things” are not intrinsically our mission. We don’t really get to decide what we are “supposed” to do. Jesus has already done that. In each of the four Gospels as well as the book of Acts, we find a form of the Great Commission. So 5 times from the lips of Jesus, we find in the Bible his expectation for his people—for his church. We don’t really get to decide what church success looks like—we get to abide by what Jesus says church should be and do. Doing church well is just simply not enough. We must embrace our mission.

Lesson Outline:

I. We must follow Jesus (Mt. 16:24; Mt. 28:18).

II. We must obey his commands (Mt. 28:19).

III. We must rely on his presence (Mt. 28:20).

We must follow Jesus.

Matthew 16:24 If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

There is little doubt that Christ’s intention for his first disciples and for Christians today is to follow him. In a recent Barna study, a whopping 73% of Americans identify as Christians. It appears that if 73% of Americans are Christians, then many of these Christians have a different definition for their Christianity than following Christ.

So what does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus? First, being a disciple means that we deny self. Andrew Murray described self-denial, “Self is the root of all lack of love and obedience. Our Lord called His disciple to deny himself, to take up his cross, to forsake all, to hate and lose his own life, to humble himself and become the servant of all. He did so because self—self-will, self-pleasing, self-seeking—is simply the source of all sin.” We cannot be a disciple of Jesus Christ and pursue selfish desires and sinfulness. The two are incompatible. Think of denying self like going on a diet. If you are on a diet, you might deny yourself sugar or carbohydrates. Spiritually,
denying self, means that you reject sinful habits and/or run from temptation.

Secondly, being a disciple means that we must take up our cross. This only meant one thing to the disciples under Jesus’ voice—death. Bearing “your” cross is not your difficulty or your disappointment. While each of us does have a specific cross to bear—a specific challenge or suffering—that cross must lead to self-death. It is not enough that we wear our “burden” for others to see. Rather, what is it in your life that causes you to cast yourself on the glories and suffering of Jesus’ cross? While denying self is setting aside habits or avoiding temptations, taking up your cross is dying to those sins. To take up your cross means that you consider those sins dead on the cross and buried in your past.

Thirdly being a disciple means that we follow Jesus. Following Jesus is the positive action after the two rather negative demands—self-denial and self-death. For the Christian, Jesus is much more than a good story; he is our example to follow. Many followed Jesus as teacher and miracle worker. Even Pharisees and religious leaders were present in the crowds. But following Jesus in his suffering, in his pain, in the long lonely road to Gethsemane, and then to the separation and suffering he felt on the cross is a different story. How could Jesus demand such of his followers? Jesus expects those who would be Christians to follow him even in his suffering. Jesus leads us down this road of suffering because he’s already been there. Dietrich Bonhoeffer observed,

“It is laid on every Christian. The first Christ-suffering that everyone has to experience is the call which summons us away from our attachments to this world. It is the death of the old self in the encounter with Jesus Christ. Those who enter into discipleship enter into Jesus’ death. They turn their living into dying; such has been the case from the very beginning. The cross is not the terrible end of a pious, happy life. Instead it stands at the beginning of community with Jesus Christ. When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”

So the walk of discipleship is one of self-denial, self-death and following Jesus. Following Jesus is the emulation of the conduct and character of Jesus in your life. When Jesus invites us to become a Christian, it is not an invitation for the mealy-mouthed and weak-kneed. It is an invitation to those ready for a challenge. It is an invitation to those who are willing to face spiritual difficulty. It is an invitation to those willing to grow in maturity. It is an invitation to walk on a narrow road. It is a command from the King.

*And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”*

- Matthew 28:18

When Jesus says we are to follow him, when he commissions us, he is not offering a suggestion. Discussion Question: What is the difference between a suggestion and a command? Jesus is not giving a suggestion. He’s giving a directive. Matthew goes to great lengths to describe Jesus as King.

In Matthew 1:5 David the king, is listed in Jesus’ genealogy. In Matthew 2, the wise men travel first to Jerusalem to find the Christ. Herod, from the testimony of the religious leaders, tells them the new ruler will be born in Bethlehem. In Matthew 4:17, Jesus’ first sermon on the gospel of the Kingdom. The Kingdom of heaven is a key theme throughout Matthew, especially the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). In Matthew 16:13-20, Peter confesses Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. Then Jesus commends Peter and then connects the church to the “kingdom.” In the passion narratives, Jesus is also referenced as the “King of the Jews” on a number of occasions: 27:11, Pilate’s question; 27:27-30, soldier’s mockery; 27:37, sign on the cross; 27:42, religious leaders’ mockery. Clearly, Matthew wants his readers to see Jesus as the King. When kings give commands, subjects obey.
When the King, Jesus, commissions us then we must obey.

**Discussion**
How do we deny ourselves?

What does it mean to take up our cross?

Discuss the importance of understanding Jesus as King for his commission to us.

**We must obey his commands.**

*Matthew 28:19-20a*  
> 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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

The imperative in Jesus’ command here is to “make disciples.” Known as the Great Commission, Jesus’ statement is our mission. It is the basis for our mission statement—*leading our neighbors and the nations to follow Jesus.* We cannot improve upon Jesus’ expectation to make disciples.

In the Great Commission, Jesus used three participles to describe how we are to make disciples—*going, baptizing,* and *teaching.* *Going* suggests evangelism and intentionality. *Baptizing* suggests identification with Jesus and the body of believers. *Teaching* suggests that we must learn and apply what Jesus has said to us.

Jesus gave us the command to follow him (Matthew 16:24). Jesus gave us the command to make disciples (Matthew 28:19). Of course, Jesus gave us more commands, but for our purposes in this lesson, obeying the commands of Jesus comes down to these two. We must follow him, and we must lead others to follow him (make disciples).

And how do we obey Jesus’ commands to follow him and lead others to follow him? That question is the specific subject of the next 13 weeks of Sunday School lessons. We lead our neighbors and the nations to follow Jesus by worshiping, learning, serving and replicating. Each step will be the subject of two lessons. We will also explore the foundation for our mission—God’s Word, the empowerment for our mission—prayer and the purpose for our mission—evangelism and missions. If we are to follow Jesus, obedience to the Great Commission in leading others to follow Jesus is primary.

**Discussion**
How does going fit into disciple-making?

How does baptizing fit into disciple-making?

How does teaching fit into disciple-making?

**We must rely on his presence.**

*Matthew 28:20b*  
> And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

But Jesus’ command sounds daunting, even impossible. Yes. That is why he promised to be with us always. He has the authority to accomplish this mission. He assigned us this mission. And He promised that we would not be alone in accomplishing this mission. So how do these characteristics relate to our mission statement?

In the next few weeks, you’re going to be challenged, encouraged and hopefully motivated to begin a life long journey of following Jesus and leading others to follow him. You are not alone. When you trusted Jesus to be your Savior, He promised to be with you always. Learning to rely on the presence and power of Jesus is how we will see others become followers.

Jesus has promised to be with us. He promised to teach us. He gave us the Holy Spirit to be our guide and teacher (John 16:13). You can be certain that Jesus wants you to succeed at his mission. There can be no doubt that God wants you to make disciples—to lead your neighbors and the nations to follow him. Are you willing to lead?
According to Robert Quinn in his book *How Ordinary People Can Change the World*, one of the roots of the word *lead* is from Gothic “leit,” or go forth and die. Quinn suggests, “Leadership authors do not understand that leadership means ‘go forth and die.’ If they understood it, they would not be enticed to write about it—because people do not want to hear this message. Most people want to be told how to get extraordinary results with minimum risk. They want to know how to get out-of-the-box results with the in-the-box courage.”

It is in this sense “go forth” that we are using the term—lead. We cannot possibly lead someone else to follow Jesus unless we are following Jesus ourselves. And Jesus led the way. If we take the etymological root all the way to “go forth and die,” then Jesus did that as well. He led the way by going to the cross. He was willing to give his life that others/us may be forgiven. Now, he is giving that assignment to us—leading our neighbors and the nations to follow Jesus.

E.P. Scott lived out this idea beautifully. In the 19th century he became a missionary to the Naga people group in India. The Naga tribes were “renowned for their savagery as headhunters. Tradition holds that before a Naga man could marry, he had to kill thirty of his enemies, shrink their heads, and wear them on his neck to prove his bravery.” Even after being discouraged by the British soldiers in the region, Scott believed God was calling him to take the gospel to these tribes. Upon meeting 12 or so men in the forest, who had surrounded him with spears, he pulled out his violin to play and sing, “Am I a Soldier of the Cross?”

Am I a soldier of the cross,
A follower of the Lamb,
And shall I fear to own His cause,
Or blush to speak His Name?

After singing and opening his eyes, he was still alive. The tribe was amazed by the music and song and as long as Scott had his violin, he was welcome to stay in the Naga lands and share the good news. But he was willing to “go forth and die” to lead these unreached peoples to the gospel. Are you? Am I?

So as you begin this journey, consider this prayer,

*Lord Jesus, I know you are King. And you have commissioned us/me to lead others to follow you. I may not be sure of how, but I’m willing to obey. Would you help me follow you? You led the way by dying for my sins. I trust you. Would you help me follow you by leading others to follow you?*

**Discussion**
What are some practical ways that we can rely on the presence of Jesus?

**Application**
Lead our neighbors and the nations to follow Jesus.

Who do you know that needs to meet Jesus?

Who will you begin praying for that during this 13 week journey, you can introduce to Jesus?

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2 Andrew Murray, *The School of Obedience*, 69.
3 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 81.
4 Quoted by Eric Geiger in *Designed to Lead*, 5.