

Baptized to Make Disciples

- Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 2:41-47
- We celebrate baptism when there are new believers who are ready to be baptized, as we will do today after the service. Several years ago, we looked at the eight signs of a healthy and growing church, and one was that they observed the sacraments in the first church in Jerusalem. Three thousand people were participants in their first baptism, and they devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread (The Lord's Supper) and to prayer. Why did they observe the sacraments? Because Jesus commanded it. First, He commanded that the church observe the Lord's Supper, although there is no clear command about how often we are to observe it. When He instituted the Lord's Supper He said, "Do this in remembrance of Me." Second, He commanded that we the church is to baptize those who become disciples. When He commissioned His disciples to go into all the world with the Gospel, He said that making disciples includes "baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Baptism and the Lord's Supper are visual aids for us; they are pictures of our life in Jesus Christ. They are doctrinal dramas, if you will. Let's look at baptism today, in anticipation of the one that will take place right after the service. First, what is baptism? Second, what follows baptism?
- **What is baptism?**
- Baptism is an outward sign of an inward condition. The person being baptized has already been saved. Baptism is often called the front door of the church because many times in Scripture it was the very first thing a person did AFTER he or she was saved. Baptism was the first act of the 3000 on the day of Pentecost after they had been cut to the heart by Peter's sermon about Jesus and they had repented of their sins and received saving grace. They were then baptized. Not to GET saving grace but because they already had it! Baptism was the first act of Lydia and her household after they heard and believed the Gospel. (Acts 16:14-15) It was the first act of the Philippian jailer and his household, after they had heard and believed the Gospel. (Acts 16:30-34) It was the first act of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8, when Philip was led by the Holy Spirit to approach the chariot of this important official and ask him if he understood the Scriptures he was reading. In every case then, and now, baptism is a public identification with Jesus Christ and His body, the local church. It is a public statement to all witnesses that says, "I have surrendered to Jesus Christ and now I belong to Him." That's one reason we like to do baptisms outside, so that the world driving by can see. It is a public declaration of faith in Jesus. This is why baptism for a Muslim or a Hindu is such a big decision. They may be able to keep things fairly normal for a little while after receiving salvation, but once a Muslim or a Hindu goes through with baptism, they are going to be cut off from their family. From their culture. Sometimes from their jobs. Sometimes from their community. And in extreme cases, they are signing their own death warrants. Which would make the visual picture of baptism, the metaphor, become even more powerful than it already is.
- Baptism is explained clearly by Paul in **Romans 6:1-4**.
- Do you see that? Baptism is a dramatic reenactment of what has already taken place in the spiritual realm the very instant a person is given faith to believe and God takes their sins away. They are baptized into the death of Christ Jesus, symbolized by being put under the water just as Jesus was put into the grave. Then, they are raised to walk in newness of life, "just as Christ Jesus was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father." That leads to the second point.
- **What follows baptism?**
- That goes back to what preceded it! Look at Matthew 28 again, and the great commission. Jesus commanded His disciples to "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them...teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." Jesus spent three years making disciples of the 12, and

before He ascended into heaven, He commanded them to do the very same thing. Go. Make. Disciples. Then baptize them, and teach them to do the very same thing: go make disciples. Teach them to observe all that I have commanded you, Jesus says. And what is the final thing Jesus commands them to do: go, make disciples.

- I want to encourage you who are being baptized today that your job from this day forward is not just to grow as a disciple, a follower of Jesus yourself, but to go, make disciples! I want to encourage all of us who dried off from our baptism YEARS ago, that that is our calling as well: to go, make disciples. The truth is, very few Christians are doing that. Dawson Trotman, the founder of the Navigators many years ago, used to ask people thinking about going to the mission field two questions. First, “How is your devotional life? Do you feel like your time with the Lord is what it is supposed to be?” Second, he asked them, “How many persons do you know by name today who were won to Christ by you and are living for him now?” He said, “The majority had to admit that they were ready to cross an ocean and learn a foreign language, but they had not won their first soul who was going on with Jesus Christ. A number of them said that they got many people to go to church; others said they had persuaded some to go forward when the invitation was given. I asked, “Are they living for Christ now?” Their eyes dropped. I then continued, “How do you expect that by crossing an ocean and speaking in a foreign language with people who are suspicious of you, whose way of life is unfamiliar, you will be able to do there what you have not yet done here?”
- In other words, transformation does not come through aviation. It comes through walking in the dust of the Rabbi, as they used to say about discipleship. And look! This encouragement from Trotman is not just for missionaries who will cross an ocean. It is for each of us. We are all missionaries, called by Jesus to “go, make disciples” wherever we are.
- JD Greear said that he asked one of the most effective disciplers he knows to share with him his discipleship ‘system.’ He was expecting something elaborate and detailed. Instead, the man sent him a photocopied list of verse references he had typed out in the 1980s. “He explained that he gives that list to the person he’s trying to bring to faith and asks them to read the verses and then write on a sheet of paper what they think each verse means and what God might be saying to them through it. He then meets with them the next week to discuss their answers. After that, he said, he asks them if they want to read a book of the Bible together and do the same thing.” That was it! But JD said that every time they have a baptism, that man has someone in the lineup – either from him directly or from someone he led to Christ who has now led someone else to Christ. Greear said, “I think he is at least a great-great-great-grandfather.”
- It is why we exist as a church: to make disciples. If people are not growing in their faith in a church, and helping others to come to faith and grow up as disciples, then the church has missed its calling. The Great Commission IS mission, and we are each missionaries. We all have different gifts, but they all work for the same purpose: to build the body of Christ and to point people to Jesus.
- David Platt has a great illustration for this. I would ask my firefighter son-in-law, Captain Maher, to come up here and help with this, but I don’t want to embarrass him. But Platt had a group of people come up to the stage and act out the different jobs people on a fire truck have. Because the success of a firefighting team depends on them each doing their job well. One person was assigned to drive the truck. Another person was the nozzleman, in charge of the hose. Then there was the utility man, and the hydrant man, and so on. After Platt got them all situated, and doing their various jobs, he asked them, “Ok, what is your job again?” They each told them what they did. “I’m the nozzleman!” “I’m the driver!” and so forth. After they had all answered, he said, “You’re all wrong. Your job - every one of you – is to *put out fires!*” Every gift we have serves the larger purpose of making disciples. Different ministries. One mission. We live to reproduce, to bear fruit.
- God did not design just certain, special humans, to be able to reproduce other humans, right? We each, under healthy circumstances, have the possibility for human reproduction. In the same way, God did not call certain people to “go, make disciples.” He has given each one of us who belong to him everything we need to be able to do that. If you say, “I can’t do it,” let me remind you that you have the Spirit of the living God

in you. If you say, “but evangelism is not my gift,” that is ok, too. It is not MOST people’s gift. But the gift of evangelism is just an extra empowerment to do what each of us is called to do: be a witness for Jesus Christ. Go, make disciples. If you say, “Well, I witness with my life.” That’s great! Keep doing that! But when Paul asked for the Ephesian church to pray for him, he didn’t say, “pray that my life might be more visible to the lost!” He asked them to pray, “also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel.” Sometimes people misquote St. Francis of Assisi, who never said, “Preach the Gospel at all times; if necessary, use words.” He never said that. The closest he got to it was encouragement that we must make sure our lives match our words. But to say, “preach the Gospel at all times; if necessary use words” is like saying, “Feed the hungry at all times; if necessary, use food.” To be a witness requires us using words. Go, make disciples. If you say you don’t have time, you misunderstand the command. Jesus was saying, “As you go,” make disciples. It doesn’t mean you have to stand on a street corner and preach, although you can. It means that your lifestyle intentionally becomes gospel-oriented. We are 250 people who are working and shopping and living and doing life all over two or three counties. As you do life, look for opportunities to make disciples. At soccer practice or at the studio. On the campus. At Aldi’s. Where you work. Tim Chester wrote that evangelism is “doing normal life with gospel intentionality.”

- So, let me close with this charge to you who will be baptized today. And to all of the rest of us! Paul wrote in Colossians 2:6-7, “Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.” Walk in him. Be rooted and built up in him. Established in the faith, the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints, as Jude says. Just as you were taught. Ahh, that takes us back to Jesus’ commission for each of us: go, 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.”
- What did he command us to do? Go. Make. Disciples. Let’s do it.
- Prayer