

## WHAT JESUS SAID TO HIS DISCIPLES *Part 2*

**MATTHEW 28:16-20**

The abbot of a monastery once called a novice into his office and instructed him to give the sermon at the chapel service for the monks the next morning. The novice was struck with great fear and dread. The next morning he stood at the pulpit during the chapel service. The other monks were there. His hands trembled, his knees knocked, and his voice quivered. There was a long, awkward pause before he asked this question, “Do you all know what I’m going to say?” The other monks shook their heads. He said, “Neither do I. Let’s stand for the benediction.” The next day, he did and said the same thing at chapel. “Do you all know what I’m going to say?” This time the other monks had a pretty good idea, so they all nodded yes. The fearful monk responded, “Then there’s no need for me to tell you. Let’s stand for the benediction.”

The abbot was really irritated. He brought the young novice into his office and said, “If you do that again, you’re going to be sent to solitary confinement, eat only bread and water for thirty days, and receive any other punishment I can think of. Tomorrow morning give the sermon! Do it right!” The next day chapel attendance hit an all-time high. Everyone was there to see what the novice would say and do. It was a repeat performance: trembling hands, knocking knees, quivering voice, and the question, “Do you all know what I’m going to say?” Some of the monks nodded yes while others shook their heads no. The novice replied, “Let those who know tell those who don’t. Let’s stand for the benediction.”

“Let those who know tell those who don’t.” That might well be the most concise definition out there for the word “evangelism” – which is today’s subject. We’re looking at what Jesus said to individuals and groups over a period of forty days between His resurrection and His ascension back to Heaven. Those were Jesus’ real last words. The statement we want to think about today is found at the very end of Matthew’s Gospel. It’s one of two recorded encounters in the Bible between Jesus and all of His original disciples minus Judas, of course. Let’s read it just now. I believe Jesus’ last words to His disciples here helps us answer three questions. First...

### WHAT IS EVANGELISM?

The word “evangelism” doesn’t appear in what we read, but it’s pretty well defined here, nevertheless. The word “evangelism” is actually based on a Greek word – *euangelious* – which means a “good message.” The first thing we can say about evangelism is that it’s simply sharing the good message about who Jesus is and what He’s done with someone else. It’s explaining to someone why he or she needs Jesus, how they can receive forgiveness of their sins, and helping them put their faith in Jesus.

But notice how Jesus coupled evangelism with encouraging a person to become His disciple. Discipleship and discipling is a big deal here at KRBC because Jesus made it so right here. It’s all well and good to believe in Jesus’ existence and what He did on the cross and the empty tomb. But real believing goes beyond mere acknowledgement. A disciple is an everyday follower of Jesus which means inviting

Him to have access to your life every day and make changes in it as He sees fit. Discipleship assumes personal commitment and absolute loyalty to Jesus. Jesus mentioned the importance of getting baptized in water here. Why? Because it's an important outward symbol of what's happened inwardly. You're a new person in Jesus. Your old self-centered life is gone. Your new Jesus-centered life has begun. You're a disciple of Jesus. That means more than knowing about who Jesus is and what He did. It means doing what He said to do. Jesus said here it means teaching people to obey everything He commanded us to do. It means more than deliverance from Hell and eternal life in Heaven. It also means Jesus is my Lord, Boss, and King today.

You can't really separate evangelism and discipleship, because they're organically connected. That's why in our KRBC picture of a disciple - the acronym ROPES – the E stands for evangelism. Of course, being a disciple of Jesus entails relationships – the R – in ROPES, obedience to God – the O, prayer – the P, and a growing knowledge of Scripture – the S. But evangelism is also intrinsic to being a disciple of Jesus. Jesus never wanted us to stop sharing the good message about Him with others and getting better at explaining and persuading people to become His followers. It's similar to someone new to our community asking us after church one Sunday, "So, how do I get to downtown Columbus from here?" You say, "Well, get in your car and turn it on." But, then, without another word, you walk away. Now, that's good advice and you did get this person started. But he or she needs more help than that, right? So, in addition, you say, "Take a left out of the parking lot onto Karl, then turn right onto Morse. Take the exit off of Morse onto 71 South and keep going until you get to downtown Columbus." Making disciples is simply giving people spiritual directions so they end up in the right place.

The fact is you can't truly be a disciple of Jesus – a committed follower of Jesus – and just care less about evangelism. If being a disciple means obeying Jesus' commands, then it means sharing the good news about Jesus with others. Jesus said He'd come to seek and save spiritually lost people. Those are people who lack a personal relationship with His Father. They're doomed to an eternity in Hell if they don't repent and put their faith in who Jesus is and what He's done for them. No amount of personal morality is going to get them into Heaven. This is why Jesus came into the world. This is why Jesus allowed Himself to be humiliated, tortured, and crucified on a cross. If you don't think evangelism is important for you personally to be involved in, you're not a disciple of Jesus. Plain and simple. You've failed to see Jesus' heart, His passion, and why He came into the world. Even your claim to be a Christian might be in serious doubt if you don't think evangelism personally applies to you. This is just very basic, fundamental, and foundational stuff. Jesus' last words answers a second question.

### **WHY SHOULD I VALUE EVANGELISM?**

First, you and I should value evangelism because God does highly. He places great value on bringing men, women, boys, and girls into a personal and forever relationship with Him through His Son, Jesus. No one is automatically born a child of God. People

must be told what God has done for them and then they must receive that message and enter into that experience by faith. This is why the Bible was written. This is why Jesus came. If we claim to love and know God, then obviously it means we will care about what God cares about. We will value what He values. If we don't, what's the obvious conclusion? We aren't truly His children. We aren't truly Jesus' disciples.

Why should you and I value evangelism? Because someone valued you enough to share the good message of Jesus with you; therefore, you should value others in the same way. Who was it that helped you come to faith in Jesus? Was it a parent, a Sunday School teacher, a VBS worker, a pastor, a youth leader, a relative, or a friend? If you're a follower of Jesus today, it's because someone somewhere valued you. Someone prayed for or with you. Someone came along alongside you. Someone explained who Jesus is and what He did for you. Someone perhaps even prayed with you to receive Jesus as your Lord and Savior. Now, it's your turn and mine to be that someone for another person. It's your turn to reciprocate. Not because it earns you points with God somehow. Nothing we ever do earns us points with God. No, instead we do it out of sheer gratitude. God touched your life through someone else because He loves and values you. When you let that truth get a hold of your life, your only response can be, "Father, thank You! Thank You for loving and valuing me enough to send so-and-so into my life. Lord, how can I show my gratitude? Lord, let me that someone for John, or Mary, or Bob, or Sue."

Why else should you and I value evangelism? Because God commands us to do it. What Jesus said to His disciples here wasn't just intended for those eleven men and no more. It was meant for every follower of Jesus in every place at every time. You probably know Jesus' words here are often referred to as the Great Commission. Jesus commissioned or sent out every one of His followers to share the good message about who He is and what He's done. Sadly, only a fraction of Christians truly believe Jesus' words here apply to them. Let pastors do it. Let professional evangelists do it. Let missionaries do it. Let only those who have the spiritual gift of evangelism do it. Did you know 95% of Christians never lead even one person to a saving relationship with Jesus? Statistics like that one have led some observers to refer to Jesus' statement here as the Great Omission rather than the Great Commission! Christian, let me ask you and me this question. Have I omitted Jesus' command from my life's priorities?

A lot of Christians feel inadequate or unworthy to share the good message about Jesus with others. In the spring of 1940, Nazi troops were defeating French troops and preparing to invade Great Britain. The British Army floundered on the coast of France in the channel port of Dunkirk. Nearly a quarter of a million young British soldiers and another 100,000 other allied troops faced capture or death. Hitler's troops closed in for an easy kill. The British Royal Navy had enough ships at the time to rescue barely 17,000 soldiers. The British people were told to brace for "hard and heavy tidings." As a despairing world watched with fading hope, a bizarre fleet appeared on the horizon of the English Channel. Trawlers, tugs, fishing boats, lifeboats, sailboats, pleasure crafts, an island ferry named *Gracie Fields*, and even the American's Cup challenger,

*Endeavor*, all manned by civilian sailors, sped to the rescue. This ragtag armada eventually rescued 338,682 men and returned them to the shores of England protected by Royal Air force pilots who took on the German Luftwaffe in the skies above the channel. Dunkirk was one of the most remarkable naval operation in history. You and I – and the Church of Jesus Christ as a whole - look a bit like that ragtag armada. This church and every church is chock full of flawed, limited followers of Jesus who are, nevertheless, called and equipped by Jesus to be a vital part of God’s great rescue operation to reach lost people who Satan wants to destroy forever. God loves to use people who feel inadequate or unworthy and don’t think they have anything to contribute to His work in this world. Jesus’ last words help us answer a third question this morning.

### **HOW SHOULD I DO EVANGELISM?**

Here are four very simple steps or truths that have been helpful to me when it comes to evangelism. First and foremost, pray for specific spiritually lost people. That’s probably the best way to start making Jesus’ priority your priority. It’s easy to get preoccupied with our own lives, our own needs, and just to stop caring about lost people. Ask God to give you His heart for the lost people in your family, in your neighborhood, at your place of work or school, just anywhere in your everyday life. I’ve found I rarely have God’s heart for much of anything He values unless I ask Him to change my heart. I’m selfish and self-centered by nature. Pray for three lost people by name – every day or several times a week. Ask God to prepare their hearts. Ask God to send them someone who can share the good message of Jesus with them and let Him know you’re willing to be that person.

How should I do evangelism? Second, build authentic friendships with lost people whenever possible. We can get used to just living in a Christian bubble – our friends, our acquaintances, the people we interact with regularly – can become predominately or only fellow Christians. That’s sad, very sad. Now, nobody wants to become someone’s project, to be sure, so if we project the attitude that a lost people is our “evangelistic project,” you’re likely to get stiff-armed. Notice, I said an authentic friendship. That simply means I’m prepared to make and keep a lost person as my friend even if he or she never becomes a follower of Jesus. That person is still valuable and loved by God even if they never trust in Jesus.

How should I do evangelism? Third, take advantage of divine opportunities God provides. Believe the truth that God wants us to become effective evangelists far more than you and I ever will! Trust Him to create and open up those opportunities in a perfect way at the perfect time. And don’t get all down on yourself if you miss an opportunity God provides. I’ve missed so many of those myself it’s embarrassing to me. But, instead, ask God for another chance to take advantage of an opportunity He provides. It can be very simple things that show sincere interest in people. I’ve had a thought come into my mind, “Ask him his name. Ask him something about himself. Take an interest in him.” Where did that thought come from? The Holy Spirit was

nudging me to take the initiative. Or, if someone tells you about a hard time they're going through, you can say, "I'm really sorry to hear about that. Is it OK if I pray for you?" Someone calls those "faith flags." It's just little, everyday ways we can wave a flag, so to speak, and let lost people know you're a person of faith and a follower of Jesus. Sure, sometimes a divine opportunity can end sharing the good message about Jesus and praying with someone to receive Jesus as Savior and Lord. What a wonderful moment! Just remember that receiving Jesus as one's Savior is more often the result of a process. And, more often than not, a divine opportunity is when the Holy Spirit nudges you and me to begin praying for someone, to start a friendship, to engage in some act of caring, to show interest in a person, or to wave a faith flag.

Years ago at a Billy Graham crusade, a businessman came forward and received Jesus as his Savior at the end of the meeting. The next Sunday he went to a church he had attended infrequently. After the service, he went up to one of the church's leaders and said, "I was at the Billy Graham meeting last week. I went forward and received Jesus as my Savior." The church leader said, "I heard about that and I am delighted!" Then the new convert asked, "How long have you and I done business together?" The church leader calculated and said, "About 23 years, I think." The new convert asked, "Have you know Jesus as your Savior all that time?" "Yes, I have," said the church leader. The new Christian observed, "Well, I don't remember you ever speaking to me about Jesus during all those years. I have thought highly of you. In fact, I thought so highly of you that I felt if anyone could be as fine a person as you and not be a Christian, then I didn't have to be a Christian either." Ouch! Missing divine opportunities is a tragedy. Learn to listen to those gentle nudges of the Holy Spirit and when God provides them, obey. Step into them.

How should I do evangelism? Fourth, trust God to empower you. Notice in Jesus' statement here that His command to you and me is framed by two statements about Himself. "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth.... And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Mt. 28:18, 20 NLT) On the one hand, Jesus will make every kind of spiritual resource, power, or ability available to us. I don't have a clue what all that involves, but the risen Jesus said it so it must be so. On the other hand, Jesus promises to be with us whenever we make the effort to share the good message about Him. You aren't called to do evangelism in your own strength or ability. Far from it. Jesus promises to come alongside you and me and give us all the assistance we will ever need. He'll even help you to become more willing if you feel inadequate or unworthy. I like this statement, "Without God we can't; without us He won't." You and I are totally ineffective in influencing even one person for Jesus. Without God we can't. But the fact is that God Himself has decided to rescue lost human beings through other flawed, limited human beings He's already saved like you and me. Without us He won't. Could God rescue lost people some other way? Sure! But that's not God's method or plan. So, let those who know tell those who don't!

Former Secretary of State James Baker is 91 years of age now. He became a truly committed follower of Jesus while he served in that office under the first President

George Bush. He grew up in the Episcopal Church with a good tradition of Bible in his background. At a presidential breakfast years ago, he spoke of his faith in Jesus to heads of state and all others sorts of people in attendance. He said there was a time when he didn't pay much attention to the good message about Jesus. Then, his first wife was diagnosed with cancer, and for the first time Baker began to think about death, eternity, and God. Sadly, she died and he was left alone to raise their children.

Some years later, his second wife, Susan, came to know Jesus as her Savior. She began to teach Bible studies and started praying for her husband, Jim. Some U.S. Senators who were followers of Jesus began to pray for him, too. And one day, it all came together for James Baker and he opened his heart to Jesus as Savior and Lord. He said, "I realized I could never earn the love of God. God loved me before I was even formed in my mother's womb. God loved me when Christ died on the cross."

There was an immediate result to that decision. As Secretary of State, Baker had frequent dealings with Eduard Shevardnadze, the Foreign Secretary of the then USSR. Baker liked Shevardnadze. As soon as he became a disciple of Jesus, Baker thought to himself, "I've got to win Shevardnadze to Jesus Christ." After a diplomatic event, Baker invited Shevardnadze to a ranch he owned in Wyoming. At dinner one night, he presented Shevardnadze with a pair of Western cowboy boots as a gift. Then Shevardnadze presented Baker with a surprising gift. It was an enameled picture of Jesus washing the disciples' feet. Shevardnadze said to Baker, "You see, Mr. Secretary, even we Communists are changing our minds on spiritual things." Later when the two went fishing at the ranch, Baker began to share his faith. It wasn't long before Eduard Shevardnadze opened his heart and received the Lord Jesus Christ. In diplomatic circles, you're not supposed to meddle in one another's personal religion. But when you're filled with the love of Jesus, God will provide opportunities, nevertheless. Because, you see, He has all authority in Heaven and on Earth.

When you're a follower of Jesus – not just a believer, but a disciple – you want what He wants. Increasingly, what His heart aches for is what your heart aches for. Jesus came to seek and to save those who are spiritually lost. He invites you and me to help Him accomplish His mission. "Without God, I can't; without me, He won't."