The Task of Making Disciples

In his record of the Great Commission, Matthew emphasises the idea of making disciples. In some versions this is obscured by the words, 'teach all nations'. Other versions use the more correct, 'disciple the nations'. This is an obligation on us all.

Matthew doesn't emphasise the counting of numbers – a very superficial estimate of the task we have been set. Matthew presents its comprehensive nature, its depth in human hearts and the safeguards essential to its fulfilment. There must be an **imitation**, followed by a **process** of development in the life of the disciple. He/she must be taught all the things that Jesus commanded and must learn to observe and do them. Anything less than this is not a fulfilment of the Great Commission.

The first step introduces us to the word 'baptism'. I intend to move away from this as fast as I can. It is the spiritual content I want to emphasize. I leave the means to you. Luke foresaw misunderstanding and abuse and stressed the necessity of repentance and forgiveness. Whatever views we have of baptism, our major emphasis must be that people need Jesus. All people need to be brought to Jesus by an **act of repentance** and by **the reception of new life**.

The second step indicates an acute dissatisfaction on our part with just an initial act of surrender that doesn't follow on to maturity. Paul gives a magnificent summary of our task in Col. 1:28: ***"That we may present every man complete/perfect in Christ."*** Every person should be mature, fully reaching his or her potential to glorify Jesus.

A person full of malaria, can't be at his best for Jesus. A woman unable to read her Bible is unlikely to become fully mature 'in Christ'. If people can't keep body and soul together they need help. There **is** a place for medicine and transformational social work. Holistic ministry has led us into many new insights into our task, but it has the potential to lead us into new dangers – so that we become **too comprehensive**, too occupied with the **peripherals** and we neglect the central task of bringing people into maturity in the Lord Jesus. The great fact is that there is no way of bringing people to completion/maturity/perfection outside the Lord Jesus.

It was the Lord Jesus who brought **the compulsion of love** to our work. The fruit of this has brought immeasurable blessing to the world. Huge numbers have been so impressed by the fruit of this that they have come to see it as an end in itself – cut off from the motivating power. However, fruit growing is not long sustained when severed from its roots. Cut flowers don't last long.

Making disciples is a slow job! We often bypass it to take a shortcut and obtain the fruits without having to plant the roots. We can't bypass the worldview of the people we love. The chief obstacle to new life is that worldview. Only Jesus can change it. Any conversion, that doesn't lead to service (ministry) is inadequate and any form of service that is not rooted in Jesus cannot produce fruit. There are many, many different methods of ministry, but in all of them we must keep **central** the conviction that every person **needs** Jesus and everyone needs to be **mature** in Jesus.

I am thankful for the growth of transformational development and transformational business. I deeply resent the implication that it is all just a 'bait to win converts'. It is an expression of God's deep love for people. I don't like the idea that the suffering patients need to listen to a harangue before getting a pill! But after offering the finest of modern medicine, we recognise a deeper need – the necessity to give the Gospel, for it is only the Gospel that meets people's deepest need. Failure to give the Gospel would be criminal!

But discipling is not limited to teaching the essential facts – a collection of things to be memorized or even rules to live by. The emphasis has to be on the transmission of **abundant life** and this can only be done by imitation. It is the development of the gifts of God in daily life. Without this there is no glorifying God. This requires **worship** in spirit and in truth.

Songs are an aid to worship, but aids are not worship nor are feelings, though these may be rightly stirred. Aids that come through the intellect – a beautiful, integrated comprehension of truth – may help us. But this is not worship. **Worship is the total response of the whole person to God**. The will is affected. A choice is made. It is aided by the emotions and the intellect. But in the last analysis, it involves the surrender of our souls/spirits again saying, 'Yes' to God. Worship that demands no choice, no decision of the will, does not glorify God.

One of the **greatest contributions you can make** is to lead your fellowship – especially the new believers in true spiritual worship! Real life is reproductive – training people in true worship! The churches that we come from are pretty well what we, western evangelicals, have made them. We train people in forms of worship, in managing meetings etc. But is there any actual demonstration of real worship – saying 'Yes' again to God? Is there an opening up of our hearts to our disciples so they see us as real people with difficulties and temptations like themselves, when we share the joys of the abundant life in Jesus?

How can we get new believers to share their story? By teaching? By holding classes? The only way is by telling our story ourselves and this can only be done by cultivating our friendships with local people. We often talk about 'unreached peoples' and the tipping point between 'unreached' and 'reached'. But the field for Godliness/holiness is not overcrowded! The longing to bring people to Jesus is still very rare. People with zeal and a passionate devotion to Jesus are still very greatly needed.

Paul only once alluded to himself as a priest – Rom. 15:16: ***"To be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the Gospel of God; that the offerings of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit."***

We too are priests making an offering of our new believers. We know from the Old Testament that an offering must be perfect. Our task is to bring them to spiritual maturity – a perfect sacrifice – every person mature in Jesus. If there are only a few, our labour will not have been in vain. For these few will reproduce other disciples and God will be glorified.