

# THE CALL TO DISCIPLE-MAKING

A Thousand Audiences  
Matthew 28:18-20  
September 30, 2018

**Summary:** Imagine not one but two ocean liners striking icebergs in the cold North Atlantic. Both ships are sinking and neither has enough lifeboats. But your rescue ship spots them both just as the *Titanic* breaches and breaks in half. So you rush into the debris field, and your whole crew works with all its might, saving many lives. But there are people in the water everywhere. More than you can save. Even if you could reach them all, your boat couldn't hold them all. But just then you hear a distress call, in a heavy Arabic accent, from the other ship. The *Gigantic*, a cruise ship from the U.A.E., is sinking a thousand yards away. What do you do?

If the only criterion is *Care*, you probably ignore the distress call because there are more people than you can care for right in front of you. But what if your fleet commander gave you a specific *Commission*? A *command* to rescue people from all nations? What if he said that he always wanted you pushing to the frontiers, tending to those who have no one to help? In that case you might send some of your best and strongest crewmates in launch boats to the other ship. Or you might leave the launch boats with the *Titanic* and send the whole rescue ship to the other vessel.

That's the call and challenge of the Great Commission. It's not merely to make disciples, but to make disciples of all nations. The Greek word is *ethne* and that **defines** the mission more specifically. It's not just geo-political nations, but all cultural, linguistic, and ethnic groups. There are only 195 nation-states in the world, but about 17,000 people groups.

In **defense** of this commission as binding upon all of us—and not just the original apostles—we remember that Jesus said to teach people to obey everything he commanded, which would include the Great Commission. Moreover, why would Jesus promise his presence to the very end of the age if the mission wasn't to be carried forward by us? No, this is clearly our commission just as much as it was the Eleven's. And God's heart has always been to build his global family. From the very first "great commission" when God called Abram to *go* from his homeland to a new place where he would become a blessing to all nations (Genesis 12:1-3), God has had a global vision. Let's not narrow our vision to our own parochial concerns.

But then let's **describe** how to engage: We don't all have to become missionaries to a foreign land in order to be missionaries in this cause. An old missions saw goes, "The light that shines farthest shines brightest at home"—so be on mission, evangelizing and disciple-making here. Pray diligently for people who are far from God but near to you (and those who are far from you too). By making the Great Commission a matter of daily prayer, you will not only move God to accelerate his work, but you will make yourself more available for it, which is exactly what God wants. Think too about your children. Are you envisioning them for the cause? Are you discipling them to be a part of God's mission?

Consider also that you have the world at your doorstep. Think about how many people you know who are foreign-born or who belong to an ethnic minority. Be intentional in sharing your faith with them. You might become a "foreign missionary" without ever leaving town—because a disciple you make here might go home and disciple multitudes there. The average workplace or school classroom probably has multiple *ethne* represented. People of faith should be intentionally and radically hospitable, knowing God's heart for all nations, and seizing upon the opportunity to make disciples of all nations, right here in our community.

Of course, none of this precludes people from literally *going*. People from our church have done it before, and are deployed in many places around the globe. They're obeying the call in difficult but *I-wouldn't-trade-it-for-the-world* places that are full of desperate need, but that God desperately loves.

## Discussion Guide:

1. Read Matthew 28:18-20.
2. Process the moral dilemma presented in the introduction of the two sinking cruise ships. How do you think about it? What would you do? Do you think it's incumbent upon us to show some kind of special concern or to make extra efforts to reach the unreached?
3. How do think about the fact that the Great Commission specifies ethnic groups as the object of our mission; that is, people groups distinguished by culture and language? They are so often the objects of fear and scorn. How would you describe a distinctively Christian posture toward them?
4. Do you think it's fair to list Willowdale's racial harmony initiative under the Great Commission? What would you say to people who still struggle with it, or who criticize it as being something that either adds unjustifiably to the gospel or distracts us from it?
5. The British preacher Charles Spurgeon said, "Every Christian is either a missionary or an imposter." (And hearing that, probably all of us feel some conviction about possibly being imposters.) What does Spurgeon's line say to you? What is one way that you could be more legitimately a missionary?
6. What could we do as a group to team up as missionaries?
7. How could we increase our evangelistic or great commission praying? Is this something that we could work into the regular rhythm of our personal and corporate lives? Practically speaking, how would we do it?
8. Psalm 127:4-5 says, "Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are children born in one's youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them." To which the great missionary martyr Jim Elliot said, "What are arrows for but to be pulled back on the bowstring of faith and launched into God's global battle?"
  - How does this challenge us in an age of helicopter or lawnmower parenting (where, in the name of love, parents mow down every obstacle before their children)?
  - How would you feel if your child started angling toward ministry or missions at an early age?
  - How can we not only challenge ourselves but our own children to be involved in God's mission? Can you think of ways in which they might be better at it than us?
9. Think back over the whole series on *The Call to Disciple-Making*. What have been your best take-aways?