



As we begin this morning, I want to direct your attention to the cover of your bulletin and to the mission statement that is printed at the top of it, which says, "Reaching out... welcoming in... building up... and sending forth." You might notice that I say that a lot, and I do so because I hope all of us are not only committing those four participial phrases to memory, but I also hope that all of us are increasingly committing ourselves to doing them, because those four short phrases define what it is that we believe God has gathered us together to do.

Therefore, I hope that if anyone asks you, "What is it that you do there at First Baptist Church?" you will know how to respond. You will be able to say, "Well, we reach out by joyfully serving others with our lives and the Gospel... And we welcome in everyone whom God would send by doing our best to love one another with the affection of Christ... We also build up each other by striving to become the people that God has created us to be... Finally, we delight in sending forth people humbly, yet boldly, to share the Good News of Jesus Christ." And then you might add, "You know, you really should join us, for God is so good and He is doing so many exciting things in our midst!"

It is upon that fourth purpose that we will focus our attention this morning—that is, we will take a look our mission to be sent forth as ambassadors of Jesus Christ. Let us not forget that, as delightful as it is for us to welcome in as many as possible, the truest measure of a church is seen more in whom it sends out than in whom it welcomes in. Therefore, we have great cause to celebrate today, because today we recognize and rejoice in the calling of two of our own, Brad and Holly, to the field of career foreign missions.

-- Brad's Ordination Service - Today @ 2:00

-- Holly's Baptism - At the end of the service this morning

As I have spoken with Brad and Holly about why they are choosing this blessed course for their lives, two reasons seem to stand out in every conversation. The first is that they hear the clarion call of God, and the second is that they share a common passion to proclaim the Lord they love to the lost who have not heard. You see, they are, by God's grace, walking the path of their passion. And as we recognize their call today, I pray that each one of us will also consider how God intends to use us in the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

In his book *Good News is for Sharing*, Leighton Ford tells a story about which he says he and Billy Graham would often chuckle: He writes:

"I was speaking at an open-air crusade in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Billy Graham was to speak the next night and had arrived a day early. He came incognito and sat on the grass at the rear of the crowd. Because he was wearing a hat and dark glasses, no one recognized him.

"Directly in front of him sat an elderly gentleman who seemed to be listening intently to my presentation. When I invited people to come forward as an open sign of commitment, Billy decided to do a little personal evangelism. He tapped the man on the shoulder and asked, 'Would you like to accept Christ? I'll be glad to walk down with you if you

want to.’ The old man looked him up and down, thought it over for a moment, and then said, ‘Naw, I think I’ll just wait till the big gun comes tomorrow night.’”

We chuckle, but I wonder how many of us tend to view evangelism in this same way—as the special responsibility of a select group of “big guns?” Most likely, we immediately dismiss that thought, because in our minds we know that Christ’s call to evangelism extends to us all. However, what does our daily practice suggest? Does it reveal us to be working witnesses of Jesus Christ or spectators of the sidelines? You see, although we may not all be called career foreign missions, like Brad and Holly, the big idea of the message this morning is that all of us are, nonetheless, called to personal evangelism.

-- Scripture - Matthew 28:18-20

-- Stress the importance of memorizing these verses.

-- Something a little different - Read it together as a congregation.

There really are many angles from which we might approach these verses in Matthew this morning, because this “Great Commission” of Christ is replete with profitable instruction. However, this morning, our focus is upon our collective call to personal evangelism, and in the Great commission we see at least six important ways in which Christ intends to send us forth. First of all, we must...

1.) Go compassionately.

In her book *Angels in Pinafores*, author Alice Lee Humphres tells about her experiences as a first grade teacher. In particular, she tells about one little girl who came to school one winter day wearing a beautiful white angora beret, white mittens, and a matching muff. But as she was coming through the door, a mischievous little boy grabbed the white muff and threw it in the mud. After disciplining the little boy, the teacher sought to comfort the girl. Brushing the mud off of her soiled muff, the little girl

looked up at the teacher and said in a quiet and responsible manner, "Sometime I must take a day off and tell him about God." As far as the girl was concerned, everything that was wrong with the boy could be made right if she could just tell him about God.

In many ways, we can see Christ in this little girl's heart. Although she had been so wronged by the little boy, she showed compassion to him. Her thoughts were about his welfare, and above all she wanted Him to know about God. In the same way, although throughout the ages people have sinned against God and reviled the name of Jesus Christ, He has shown His matchless compassion to us. He came to die for us so that we might know God and be saved.

Listen: Because Jesus had unparalleled compassion for us, we ought to have compassion for others. Indeed, it must be true of us that, if through faith we have inherited the Spirit of Christ, then we must be growing in a sincere love for the things Jesus loves... and Jesus loves lost people. As we read the Great Commission, we are blessed to remember that it was initially spoken only a few days after Jesus had revealed history's most perfect and complete compassion when He gave His life so that sinful men and women like you and me might be set free from sin forever. As 1 John 4:9 says, *"This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him."*

In addition, in Matthew 9:36, we read, *"When [Jesus] saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."* And that is why Christ came, isn't it. He came because He saw the desperate need of us desperate people and He was compelled by His compassion. Had Jesus had not felt compassion for us, we would have no hope for true life and no Great Commission to share.

Today, Christ has entrusted this greatest of commissions to us who labor in His Spirit and by His grace. And in the same way that His compassion compelled Him to come for us, so it will be our compassion

that compels us to take the Gospel to others. Unless you and I are willing to contemplate and comprehend the horrible and hopeless condition of those without Christ, the Great Commission in us will die at the hands of our indifference. Therefore, let us go compassionately.

Second, we must...

2.) Go confidently.

If our lack of compassion is not our greatest hindrance to sharing the Gospel, then the presence of fear probably is. Many times we want to share Jesus with someone else and the opportunity to tell about what He has done in our lives presents itself, but we hesitate because we are afraid. Perhaps we fear what they will think of us. Perhaps we think that we will get into trouble. Perhaps we fear that we will not know what to say. Whatever the reason, we too often falter because we fear.

This situation sort of reminds me of my phone calls to my girlfriends in junior high. First I would be pacing all around my room trying my best to muster the courage I could find to call the girl and planning out exactly what I would say. Eventually, I would pick up the phone and dial the first six numbers, but at the moment of truth, I would lack the courage to press the seventh. Then, after several six-digit dialing attempts, I would finally dial that seventh number and then immediately hang up. Finally, I would dial all seven numbers and let the phone ring, hoping against hope that her dad wouldn't answer.

Do you know what would have been really helpful? I would have loved it if Jesus Christ Himself had been with me at those times saying, "Go get her!" If that had been the case, then I can assure you that those phone calls would have been a lot different. I wouldn't have cared if her dad answered, because, if he did, I would have just said, "Here, you can talk to Jesus about it, because He said it was o.k." Man, that would have been great, because those phone calls were teenage torture! Unfortunately, Jesus never said to me, "All authority in adolescent dating has been given

to me. Therefore, go and woo the girl, watching movies and snuggling on the sofa, and surely I am with you.” He never said that...

However, Jesus *has* said this to every single one of us: “*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations...*” You see, the only One with all authority in all places with all power to direct all people to do all that He wants with all authority, is the very One who has given us this Great Commission to go and make disciples. Therefore, if the world says “Stay!”, we remember that Jesus says “Go!”, and we take complete confidence that His authoritative command overwhelms the world’s contention. And if the world says, “Don’t bother me!”, we gently respond, “Oh, but I must, because my orders come from on high.” We can go forth and proclaim the Good News with confidence because our orders come from Jesus Christ—the only One before whom every knee will eventually bow and every tongue will ultimately confess as Lord. Thus, let us go confidently.

In response to the Great Commission, the third way in which we must go is this: We must...

3.) Go compulsively.

This might surprise you, but I think it might just be possible that some of my personal habits drive Stephanie crazy from time to time. One such habit usually rolls around when we sit down to watch a movie together. For some reason, when I start watching the TV, I very often begin chewing on my finger nails. And the funny thing about it is that I often don’t even realize I am doing it—that is, until Stephanie grabs my hand and politely says, “Stop it!” In fact, she has been trying—unsuccessfully I might add—for many years to get me to stop chomping in my finger nails, but it remains a bad habit woven so deeply into my habits, that I still do it compulsively in spite of her best efforts.

Now, if that habit irritated me as much as it does her, I am sure I could, with God’s help, stop. However, the point I want to make from this

is that evangelism ought to be for us compulsive in a similar way. That is, it ought to be something that you and I simply cannot help but do. It ought to be woven so deeply into the fabric of our new lives in Christ that we cannot help but engage in it whenever the opportunity presents itself. For us, evangelism ought to be compulsive.

In our text, this idea shows up in verse 19. When we read this verse in most translations, including the NIV, it appears contain two commands, doesn't it? The first command appears to be the first word of the verse—"Go!"—and the second is the third word—"make." That is a fine translation, because the NIV does a good job here catching the correct meaning of this verse. In fact, almost every English version translates this sentence very similarly. However, it is interesting and helpful to note that in the original Greek text, this verse—indeed, this whole text—really has only one command. That is, in the Greek, verses 18-20 actually contain only one imperative verb, and that command is seen in the words "make disciples."

With that in mind, look with me at verse 19 in the International Standard Version of the Bible, because it does a great job keeping the original structure of verse. It reads, *Therefore, as you go, disciple people in all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit*, Notice, the word "Go" here really means something more like, "as you are going." Now, while this certainly does not mitigate our need to go all around the world in the fulfillment of this command, it does reveal something we may not realize at first glance. It tells us that we ought to be busy about fulfilling it in the everyday course of everyday life. That is, we ought to be making disciples "as we go." Evangelism, you see, is not meant to be an extraordinary enterprise for extraordinary occasions. Rather, it is the constant and compulsive communication of the Good News of God's grace spoken by those who know Christ to people who need Him. Let us, then, go compulsively.

Fourth, we ought to...

4.) Go compliantly.

Simply put, and as I have often said before, what Jesus has given us here is called the “Great Commission,” not the “Good Suggestion.” That means that it is a command with which we comply, not merely an idea with which we identify. It means that the Great Commission is an order to be obeyed, not a proposal to be pondered. However, although the evangelical world may refer to it as “The Great Commission,” we too often react to it as if it were actually just “The Good Suggestion.” We speak of Christ’s call with affection and purpose, but, too often, we respond to it with mere lip-service and indifference. While the lost and dying apart from Christ remain lost and die apart from Christ, too many of us sit on the sidelines and cheer on a few brave warriors, when, all the while, God is commanding us through His Word to get into the game. Listen: The only proper response to a clear command of Christ is obedience, and one day each of us will give an account to God regarding our obedience or disobedience of this directive. Let us, then, go forth compliantly for the glory of God.

Fifth, in our obedience to the Great Commission, we ought to...

5.) Go cooperatively.

One day a few years ago when we lived in Louisville and Deborah was four years old, I had spent most of the day sharing the Gospel at the University of Louisville. While I was sharing the Gospel with students on campus, Stephanie and the girls were at home and Deborah was missing daddy. So she asked Mommy something like, “Where is Daddy?” and Stephanie told her I was out telling other people about Jesus. In response, Deborah replied, “Well, at least he won’t have to go again tomorrow?” Curious, Stephanie asked her, “What do you mean by that?” And Deborah replied, “Well, he told them today, so they already know.”

Wouldn’t it be nice if that were true? Wouldn’t it be great if I had been able to communicate compellingly the Good News of Jesus Christ to

all people in all places on that one Saturday in Louisville? Unfortunately, the Great Commission is going to take a lot more effort from a lot more people than that. And that is why, in fulfillment of the Great Commission, we must go cooperatively. Notice in verse 19 that Jesus not only tells us to go and make disciples, but he also tells us where to go: to all nations. Clearly no single church, let alone a lone person, can fulfill this commission alone. That is why God has joined us together to fulfill this task.

And this is one of the great joys of being Southern Baptists, because, in my opinion, no organization anywhere in the world cooperates together for the fulfillment of the Great Commission better than we do, and it is all by God's grace and, I pray, for His glory alone. The need to go cooperatively is why the Cooperative Program exists in the Southern Baptist Convention. It is why our church gives an unusually large percentage of our tithes and offerings to it. It is why our church has received so many awards for our giving to the Lottie Moon Christmas offering for foreign missions. We believe in the need for and the merits of cooperative witnessing, and I praise God that you all have proven this belief through your generous giving to missions in this country and around the world.

Each of us ought to go where we can when we can and give if we cannot. While not all of us are called to be career missionaries, we are all called to missions, and we can all take the first step to fulfilling that mission through cooperative evangelism. Let us, then, go cooperatively

Finally, the Great Commission encourages us to...

6.) Go courageously.

Perhaps the most encouraging aspect of the Great Commission is found in verse 20, where Jesus promises to be with us always as we seek to fulfill this mission. To those of us who would obey His command, "*And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*" It takes tremendous courage to be willing to say yes to whatever God asks. However, the fact

that the incomparable Lord of love—our Lord, Jesus Christ—walks with us every step of the way can assuage any trepidation we may feel. We can witness with assurance, not because we are so smart, but because Christ is so sufficient. And we can go forth with courage, not because we are powerful, but because Christ is present.

God has asked Brad and Holly to go forth into the mission field, and with courage from Him, they have said yes. In the same way, He is calling you and me to go as well. Maybe He is calling you to career missions as well. Maybe He is urging you to participate in a short-term mission trip. I am convinced that He is calling all of us to go forth into the mission field of this community. Regardless of the specifics of the call, however, the charge remains the same: Go! Make disciples! Share the Good News of Jesus Christ! And go with courage because Christ has promised to go with us.

-- Conclusion (I will conclude with a story.)

During WWII, a diminutive school teacher, named Buenaventura O'Bello, was seated behind his desk with no idea that the enemy troops were on shore. Suddenly, he hears a crack at the door. And before he can get to the door it is kicked in, and instantly finds himself staring at two enemy rifles pointed at his head. The two soldiers demanded of him, "Tear down that Philippino flag right now and run our flag up that pole, or we're going to kill you." And he refused to do it. Two more times the soldiers warned him, "You do it or we are going to kill you.:" and O'Bello just kept saying, "I won't do it."

Everybody on that compound that day heard the terrible firing of those enemy rifles, and O'Bello's blood began to soak through the flag that the soldiers tossed upon his body. They wreaked havoc on that campus that day.

A missionary found O'Bello and took him to a casualty clearing station. The doctors vowed to do their best, but they were fairly certain

that O'Bello had no chance to survive. Yet, three days later, they said to the missionary, "We think the guy is going to live!"

So the missionary went to see him and O'Bello told him what had happened. "Why didn't you just take the flag down and do what they asked?" You know, You almost lost your life over that!" the missionary said.

And O'Bello rolled over on the cot so that he could look his new friend in the eye, and he said, "Sir, There comes a time in the life of every man when he must prove what he believes by what he does."