

“...going home.”

...Matthew 28:16-20 &
Luke 24:50-55

by Pastor Tim Dodson
at JF Believers Church
in Menomonie, Wisc
on February 24, 2019

Matthew 28:16-20 Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them. 17 When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted. 18 And Jesus came and spoke to them,

saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

Luke 24:50-53 And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. 51 Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven. 52 And they worshiped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, 53 and were continually in the temple praising and blessing God. Amen.

"In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also." John 14:2-3

For 145 Sundays now we have explored the Life and Times of Jesus. We have seen the miraculous and witnessed the authenticity of His claims to be the Messiah, our Savior, and God in flesh. All the while we did not “check our brains at the door.” We did not lose ourselves in some sort of religious blind faith. We saw the evidence and we weighed the facts of both scripture and history. We made note of the personal experiences of those in attendance who have come to know such events on an intimate level. And yet the reality remains that some of you still do not yet believe. This of course is not a new phenomenon, as our final account in Jesus's earthly story records the same reaction to *his* earthly ministry. So I guess I am part of a great company! He had healed the sick, made the blind to see and the lame to walk. He even brought people back from the dead. He even came back from the dead Himself, *and yet still*, “some doubted.”

On the way out the door, Jesus delivers one last final directive, ...one last “shot across the bow,” ...His “last words” we might say. **Famous last words.** Jesus delivered herein what we know as the “great commission.” This call was not to the unredeemed, but solely for the born again individual. A “commission” is “*an authoritative command or directive.*” When Jesus spoke these words directly to His disciples, and indirectly to us, He was giving the church her “marching orders.” It was given in light of everything that had happened over the previous 3 years...in reality, *everything that had happened from the beginning back in Genesis until then.* He was telling them...*and us by inference*, exactly what He expected them to do now in light of all that had transpired.

The disciples took the Lord's command seriously. They went into the world and shared the Gospel of Jesus and thousands upon thousands were saved by the grace of God. They started churches and taught the scripture with the specific goal of making disciples for Christ and kingdom. Their message was so powerful and their witness so effective that their critics accused them of “*turning the world upside down.*” (Acts 17:6.)



However, this “Great Commission” has not been so readily embraced in our generation. The truth is that the “great commission” has overtly and flagrantly become the “great omission.” Consider the following: 95% of all Christians have never won a soul to Christ. 80% of all Christians do not consistently witness for Christ. Less than 2% are involved in the ministry of evangelism. 71% do not give toward the financing of The Great Commission. Few are involved in a real and hard-hitting program of discipleship for their *own* growth, let alone giving of their time to disciple someone else! We’re busy after all. We have things to do and people to see...

There certainly has been much debate over just how we are today to receive this directive. There are those who desire to write off this call in various ways, all of which seem to have the one common trait of ultimately excusing us from the responsibility of answering. Yet the call is quite simple and quite clear. We are offered no excuses, no exemptions, no privilege or pardon. No specialized training is required. No retirement plan given. Clearly, this is for all of us. Today’s greater church instead often simply and occasionally peruses through the bible, picking which directives to receive, which ones to ignore as cultural and archaic, and which to actually *add* to make one’s religion more comfortable and palatable. Then of course there is the current political climate and the social pressures of “holding the line.” This practice will cost the player his eternity, for “God is the same yesterday, today, and forever...*he never changes.*” (Heb 13:8, Mal 3:6)

For those who are bold enough to actually receive this directive as their own, it is a call literally to a *lifestyle* of Christ centered “*seek first the kingdom of God*” living. For we are thus being directed to not just *evangelize*, but to “*make disciples.*” And that’s an important distinction, in that we so often, *individually and the church corporately*, find evangelism to be eminently more palatable than discipling. Albeit often our evangelism tends to be ‘pop’ evangelism and merely the relational sharing of our faith, not the serious advancing of the kingdom work. This “make disciples” distinction must literally change the way we live our faith in obedience to His words, and the way we “do church.” Certainly adhering to this specific call has drastically changed the practice and priority of our particular church.

Jesus went on to give a bit of specific practice aspects, saying “*Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you.*” How preoccupied the church is today with people’s emotions, feelings, comforts and worldly pursuits. When we DO actually engage, we generally just *counsel*, we don’t *disciple*! We teach rather how to have a morally comfortable life here and now, not how to truly obey Christ in all things.

We are usually just satisfied to be saved, but not motivated to see others come to find wholeness in Jesus Christ. It’s the common practice of “us four and no more.” Somehow we have come to believe that being a Christian is to come to church when we don’t have other plans, pray when needed, read the Bible occasionally, and live a life that is slightly more moral than the world around us. We have forgotten the truth that Christianity is only and literally a radical and activist faith. Our calling is not to endure to the end; but to storm the enemy. Our orders are not to sit by while the world drops off into Hell; our orders are to go into the world and both speak and live out the reality of Christ, and invest in lives for the long haul in order to “make disciples.”

The reality today is that the average self-proclaimed Christian is living a life that has very little difference from the average bloke in the world. Oh, we’re not having affairs and snorting cocaine, but we dress the same, pursue the same worldly interests, purchase the same possessions, treat our vocation the same, raise our kids the same way, and are as wholly self-absorbed and entitled as the world. Many, if not most, of us would be hard-pressed to sight any significant difference between **our** actual practice of living and the nice moral pagan down the street short of where we are on a Sunday Morning! We have “chucked” the directive to “come up from among them and *be separate.*”

Our text tells us that even though the account of His earthly life was closing, the story of Jesus...and thus *our* story, is far from over. And to be sure we understand this, He says: *"I am with you always, even to the end of the age."* He leaves this series with a promise. A promise to be with us always...even to the end. Amen indeed! John 21:25 adds the caveat *"Jesus also did many other things. If they were all written down, I suppose the whole world could not contain the books that would be written."*

Our account today records Jesus' physical departure...Jesus was "going home." There is a truth aspect that I have held in the forefront of my mind and living all of my life, one that has truly made all the difference. And that truth is that I too am "going home." Tomorrow, next week, or someday of some year in the future. But I *am* going. I *will* stand before my Lord and Master and there *will* be a "discussion!" Hebrews 9:27 says that *"each person is destined to die once and after that comes judgment."* Despite the false teachings of some religions, there will be no "soul-sleep," as such is merely yet another of man's attempts to explain and make sense of a scriptural faith paradox. When will we learn that God is not bound by earthly time and physical dimensions? Jesus had told the repentant thief on the cross that *"today you will be with me in paradise."* He told Martha in John 11:25 that *"I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die..."* Paul said in Philippians 3:20-21 *"But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior. He will take our weak mortal bodies and change them into glorious bodies like his own, using the same power with which he will bring everything under his control."*

Rev 20:11-15 *"And I saw a great white throne and the one sitting on it. The earth and sky fled from his presence, but they found no place to hide. I saw the dead, both great and small, standing before God's throne. And the books were opened, including the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to what they had done, as recorded in the books. The sea gave up its dead, and death and the grave gave up their dead. And all were judged according to their deeds. Then death and the grave were thrown into the lake of fire. This lake of fire is the second death. And anyone whose name was not found recorded in the Book of Life was thrown into the lake of fire."*

2 Corinthians 5:1-11 *"For we know that when this earthly tent we live in is taken down (that is, when we die and leave this earthly body), we will have a house in heaven, an eternal body made for us by God himself and not by human hands. We grow weary in our present bodies, and we long to put on our heavenly bodies like new clothing. For we will put on heavenly bodies; we will not be spirits without bodies. While we live in these earthly bodies, we groan and sigh, but it's not that we want to die and get rid of these bodies that clothe us. Rather, we want to put on our new bodies so that these dying bodies will be swallowed up by life. God himself has prepared us for this, and as a guarantee he has given us his Holy Spirit. So we are always confident, even though we know that as long as we live in these bodies we are not at home with the Lord. For we live by believing and not by seeing. Yes, we are fully confident, and we would rather be away from these earthly bodies, for then we will be at home with the Lord. So whether we are here in this body or away from this body, our goal is to please him. For we must all stand before Christ to be judged. We will each receive whatever we deserve for the good or evil we have done in this earthly body. Because we understand our fearful responsibility to the Lord, we work hard to persuade others. God knows we are sincere, and I hope you know this, too."*

Our Luke account says He "blessed them." Can you imagine that? To receive a blessing straight from Christ? But indeed we *have*, my friends. That's what this whole series has been about! He gave us life eternal and pointed us in the direction of life abundant. He asks for our life, and he gave his for us. He beat back death. And indeed so will we. We, too, will not stay in the grave, but will live to walk into rooms without using the door. Will we sit all snug in the comfort of this church, or will we go to our Jerusalem, and out to the "utter most parts of the earth" to be witnesses of His glory in the time that we have been so allotted?

"Heaven is a place, just as much a place as is New York or Chicago." ~ Charles Ferguson Ball

It seems that while not everyone wants to hear about Christ and Christianity, everyone wants to know about heaven and everyone wants to go there. Recent polls suggest that nearly 80% of all Americans believe there is a place called heaven. It is apparent that there is something deep inside the human heart that cries out, "There's got to be something more. Something more than the pain and suffering of this life. Something more than 70 or 80 years on planet earth.

Something more than being born, living, dying, and then being buried in the ground. From the beginning of Creation God made us to live forever somewhere. In a real sense we were made for heaven.

Not only do most Americans believe in heaven, most people expect to go there when they die. If asked "Do you think you will go to heaven when you die?" the vast majority of people would answer, "I hope so," or "I think so," or perhaps "I think I've got a good chance." Not very many people would say they aren't going to heaven. Whenever you talk about living forever somewhere, it would help to know for sure where you are going. After all, if you're wrong about heaven, you're going to be wrong for a long, long time.

The place called heaven is just as real as the place you call home. It's a real place filled with real people, which is why the Bible sometimes compares heaven to a mansion with many rooms (John 14:1-3) and sometimes to an enormous city teeming with people (Revelation 21). The Bible also tells us that heaven is the dwelling place of God. His throne is there, the angels are there, and the Lord Jesus Christ is there.

The Bible hints that heaven is not as far away as we might think. Because heaven is a real place, we sometimes think it must be outside our present universe - perhaps billions and billions of light years away. However, it's very clear that the early Christians understood that they would pass immediately from this life into the presence of Christ in heaven. It would seem that our eternal home is just beyond our perception...like a curtain that we can pass through. Perhaps that is how angelic beings throughout history have been able to pass from there to here and back again so quickly and easily.

Most of us have been indoctrinated with the worldly idea that heaven is a place where the streets are paved with gold, the gates are made of pearl, and the walls made of precious jewels. Those images come from Revelation 21, which offers us the most extended picture of heaven in the entire Bible.

I love the old story of the rich man who, on his death bed, negotiated with God to allow him to bring his earthly treasures with him when he came to heaven. God's reaction was that this was a most unusual request, but since this man had been exceptionally faithful, permission was granted to bring along just one suitcase. The time arrived, the man presented himself at the pearly gates, suitcase in hand- BOTH hands, actually, since he had stuffed it with as many bars of gold bullion as would fit. St. Peter said, "Sorry, you know the rules-you can't take it with you." But the man protested, "God said I could ... one suitcase." St. Peter checked, found out that this one would be an exception, prepared to let the man enter, then said, "OK, but I will have to examine the contents before you pass." He took the suitcase, opened it, saw the gold bars and asked quizzically, "You brought PAVEMENT?" [Note: This story is from the sermon "Heaven" by Dr. David Leininger, March 30, 1997]

1 Corinthians 13:12 tells us of how we will be in the eternal: "*Now we see things imperfectly as in a cloudy mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God now knows me completely.*"

So what will we do for all eternity? The answer is, we're going to help God run the universe. Genesis 2:15 says God gave Adam a job: to cultivate the garden and to keep it. He worked and worshipped at the same time. And the same thing will be true for us in heaven. We will do more than sing hymns and pray all day. God has responsibilities for us. In Matthew 25, Jesus told the parable of the talents, which teaches us that based on our faithfulness in this life, we will receive responsibilities in the next life. Some will rule over planets, some will rule over stars, and some will rule over galaxies. Paul said one day we will judge angels (1 Corinthians 6:3). God will give us responsibilities to carry out in eternity, and we will find eternal fulfillment in doing that. We will have jobs to do and they will be given according to our faithfulness here and now. Here are five things that will occupy us in heaven. We will ...

1. Worship without distraction.
2. Serve without exhaustion.
3. Fellowship without fear.
4. Learn without fatigue.
5. Rest without boredom.

*(1-5 by David Burns, Minister at the Homer Church of Christ, called "Heaven is a Wonderful Place," February 25, 1996. Some of the indented info taken from <https://www.biblestudytools.com/bible-study/topical-studies/what-is-heaven-like-11636670.html> and **What Will We Do In Heaven?** December 8, 2017 by Dr. Robert Jeffress)*

Jesus "went home" that day. But He had just begun to do His miraculous. Many of us here today know this, **for we are indeed still part of this incredible story of Jesus...**