

[What is the Mission of the Church?]

[Matthew 28:16-20]

INTRODUCTION

If I were to ask you what is the mission statement of the company you work for, the school you go to, or the club you are a member of, would you be able to regurgitate it to me? Sometimes these mission statements can even be hard to understand, can't they? Especially if you are working for a large corporation. Consider a critique from Weird Al Yankovic – an American musician who often pokes fun at different aspects of American culture with humor and sarcasm. Listen to verse 1 of his song entitled *Mission Statement*:

We must all efficiently
 Operationalize our strategies
 Invest in world-class technology
 And leverage our core competencies
 In order to holistically administrate
 Exceptional synergy
 We'll set a brand trajectory
 Using management's philosophy
 Advance our market share vis-à-vis
 Our proven methodology
 With strong commitment to quality
 Effectively enhancing corporate synergy
 Transitioning our company
 By awareness of functionality
 Promoting viability
 Providing our supply chain with diversity
 We will distill our identity
 Through client-centric solutions and synergy¹

These large corporations love to use complicated words that make the writers sound smart and productive. But what they end up doing is confusing all their employees and all those trying to find out about the company. Mission statements are supposed to bring clarity, not confusion. Even though some mission statements can confuse those who read them, most seem to agree that having one is important for the focus and direction of the company. The logic goes if we do **NOT** formally summarize the aims and values of the company or organization then we will easily veer off track into performing tasks totally unrelated to what needs to be done. Therefore organizations should be clear-minded and articulate in communicating their goals and purpose for their existence.

This whole discussion on mission statements begs the question, “Should the church – both universal and local – have a mission statement?” Or maybe I should ask it another way, “Does the church have a mission statement?” If so, what is it?

If a non-Christian asked you, “What is the Mission of the Church,” what would you say? Where would you go in the Bible to describe the great task or responsibility that Jesus has given his church? I don't think it is a mystery to you, beloved, of where I as a pastor think the mission

¹Yankovic, Al. *Mission Statement*. <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/weirdalyankovic/missionstatement.html>
 [Accessed online 9/15/15]

of the church is stated in the Bible. Based on our Scripture reading, that which is posted in your bulletin, I believe the mission of the church is given by Christ in the ever-so famous passage dubbed The Great Commission.

The Great Commission is Jesus' last word given to his disciples in Matthew's gospel account. It is not insignificant that Matthew left us with these last words in his account. For if you know about the Gospel according to Matthew, it was written to readers with a Jewish background and worldview. One of Matthew's purposes in writing his account was to show his audience how Jesus is the long-awaited promised Messiah from the line of David. God has fulfilled his word in giving his people their deliverer. So it's worth noting that at the end of the gospel account Matthew records Jesus saying go into all nations to make disciples. In other words, don't just stay in Jerusalem with your message, don't just keep this saving message to the Jews, but go into all nations, and by nations he means people groups, with the intent to make Jesus followers. Some have argued that Jesus' commission was for the original disciples. But this perspective falls short for at least two reasons. First, in 28:20 Jesus says I will be with you always to the end of the age. Why would Jesus say this if he did not expect following generations to follow this great command? And secondly, the account of Acts recorded by Luke shows us that the disciples understood that their task was to make disciples and those who made disciples would go, in turn, to make more disciples.

This morning I have a two-fold goal. That is to 1) outline the mission of church – the church universal – and 2) unpack its implications for us as CBCOC – the local church.
Church's Mission

I. The Church's Mission (vv. 18-20)

¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in^[b] the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

A. The Church's Mission: To make disciples of all nations

This is a clear and straightforward task. There's no talk of "operationalize" or "synergy" when it comes to the church's mission. Plain and simple, we are to make disciples of all nations. One of Matthew's prominent themes in the entire gospel is the theme of discipleship. So it makes sense that these last words of the gospel account would highlight that theme. What does it mean to be a disciple? The most basic definition is that we are a follower, a follower of Jesus. But biblically speaking to be a disciple means we not only follow Jesus, we also worship him, we serve him, and we tell others about him. In essence it means we are consumed with him; he is to be our everything. But what about the other commands given in this passage? What about "go," "baptizing," and "teaching"? Aren't these verbs commands from Christ as well? How do these directives play into the mission? From a grammatical standpoint, there are several action words but there is only one main verb. Matthew wants those reading his gospel to understand that all other actions fall under the category of making disciples; the word in the original language is the lone verb, the lone imperative/command. To go, baptizing, and teaching all fall under the category of making disciples. These tasks contribute to making disciples, but they are not the main task.

B. Supporting tasks

So if these three extra tasks are supporting actions to perform the main task of making disciples, let's examine them:

1. To Go implies doing something. It's in the active voice. We cannot go and stay in our seats at the same time. We are required to actively move from one locale to another. In the context of the passage Jesus instructs his disciples to go and make disciples of all nations. This tells us that in order to make more disciples of Jesus, Jesus' current disciples must go where people do not follow Christ. And as I alluded to earlier to all nations does not mean nations-states like Argentina, China, Belgium, and Zimbabwe. The word is ethne, where we get our word ethnic. So as those of Chinese descent you know that the Chinese government has identified at least 56 ethnic groups in China – there are probably more. Christ calls his church to go to these people – all the different people groups of the world. It's not that they should come to us, it's that we should go to them.
2. Baptizing – As Baptists we should understand this task. The act of baptizing signifies the welcoming of new people into God's church. Baptism through immersion – going under the waters of judgment and rising to new life – signifies our entrance into the covenant community. Who is permitted to be baptized? As Baptists we believe those who have consciously repented of their sins and trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ for their salvation should be immersed. Part of making disciples of all nations includes welcoming them into church through the ordinance of baptism.
3. Teaching them to observe all that Christ has commanded is the third task subsumed under making disciples. Jesus cares not for shallow disciples. Jesus cares not to be considered as simple fire insurance from hell – a make sure I get to heaven ticket. Jesus does care for maturity and well-being of his followers. Jesus does care that his church obey him.
What are we to think when our pastors travel overseas to train other pastors? These overseas pastors are already believers. Are our CBCOC pastors engaging in the mission of the church when they provide theological equipping? Yes! This is all a part of the joining in Christ's mission. We must support our pastors in this endeavor.

C. Assumption in the Mission: Central without being Explicit

Making disciples requires a commitment to the gospel message. Without the gospel we are just like moralists attempting to earn our own salvation by our own works. If there is no gospel that means man saves himself. But that is not the message of Jesus. The message of Jesus is that he died for sinners. The message of Jesus is that he experienced God's wrath on the cross. The gospel teaches that repenting from sin and trusting in Christ initiates and undergirds the life-long pursuit of following Jesus as a disciple. Therefore if the church is to fulfill its mission it must be in the business of growing in and guarding the purity of this message. The mission of Christ's church cannot be accomplished if the gospel does not remain at the front and center of the church's consciousness.

D. The Church's Mission Over and Against Purely Social Ministries

As the church seeks to faithfully obey the Great Commission it must keep the center the center, the center being the gospel. We live in an evangelical culture where it's easy to major on the minors or decentralize what should be at the center. It's a real temptation for the church to deemphasize the gospel and emphasize social ministries apart from the gospel. Many churches and Christian organizations advocate change in the area of social justice. The problem is no one seems to be able to define what social justice means. It means different things to different people. For some it involves relieving the poor and advocating for a different government structure to serve their needs. For others it means going green in order to preserve the earth. These can be considered noteworthy tasks. But the problem is, the Bible doesn't call the church to these specific tasks. The Bible calls church to make disciples. So am I saying the church shouldn't serve the needy? Am I saying the church should be voiceless when it comes to sex-trafficking? No not at all. But everything we do must be in the context of making disciples. And we make disciples by sharing with them about their need as sinners to be reconciled with a holy and righteous God.

When I was in high school I joined my youth group on a mission trip to Tijuana, Mexico to build a house for a family who had no serviceable place to live. That week we poured out sweat as we hammered nails, put up dry wall, and set beams in their place. But looking back I realized we failed that family greatly. You might be saying, "Really?! How did you fail that family? You gave them a house!" Well, too my knowledge, even though we had translators, we never shared the gospel with them. We had our opportunity to tell them why we were doing what we were doing. We had our opportunity to tell them of God's love for them in sending his Son to die on the cross for their sins. But no, we failed. So am I advocating that the church pull its funds for service projects like the one my youth group went on? No, not at all! What I am advocating is that we understand our mission as the church to make disciples so that we can use every opportunity we have to do that. That means using opportunities like that to share the gospel. That means raising support for modern day slaves in child sex trafficking so that they can have a chance to hear and respond to the saving message of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

II. Implications for CBCOC

What we believe will inevitably dictate how we live. Conduct/Behavior exists as the outworking of belief. This is why theology and teaching is so important. If you want to live rightly, you must have the sound theology. With that said, if we have a right understanding of our mission as the church, how then shall we go about fulfilling the mission in the context of our own ministry. There are a few things we need to think about.

A. CBCOC must be gospel-centered.

What does the phrase "gospel-centered" even mean? This is a term that has been thrown around a lot in the last few years amongst conservative evangelicals. What does it mean for a church to be gospel-centered? It means message of the gospel drives everything that it does. The gospel message informs how they spend money, the gospel informs who teaches from this pulpit, the gospel informs how members treat one another. A gospel-centered church is a church that emphasizes the radical nature of the gospel. Those who have fully embraced the gospel message have gone from darkness to light. They are new creations. They were dead but are now living. Our church must be about that radical change. We cannot be a church that simply adds the gospel in order to make a person's life

just a little bit better. The gospel isn't simply a tack on item for self-improvement; it is the message that raises dead men to life. So we need to ask ourselves: Is CBCOC about the gospel? Are we radical in how we love one another as fellow family members saved from the wrath of God? Are we constantly dependent upon the grace given to us at the cross? Or are we just a country club joining together to have a nice little neat community helping each other to have a better life? Brothers and sisters, I pray that we would link arms and remind each other of our daily need for Jesus. If we lose the gospel then we cease to be a church. The very thing that makes us a church is our holding fast to the message that has saved us. If we lose this message we might as well call ourselves CBCOC – Chinese Buddies Community Orange County. Making disciples requires making the gospel front and center. How can we expect the nations that we go to and the missionaries we send to make disciples if we ourselves are not making disciples in this very room? CBCOC must be gospel-centered.

B. CBCOC must be willing to send out its own for the purpose of making disciples

We must be in the business of training up the younger generation for the purpose of committing their lives to this great task. We can't hold back. Parents, did you know that Scripture places the primary task of disciples on your shoulders? Fathers, have you talked with your sons about the things of God? Mothers, have you instructed your daughters what it means to fear the Lord? The staff pastors and ministers, believe it or not, are not the main disciplers of your children. You are. The staff must come alongside parents to equip them for the task, but they cannot be considered the primary spiritual influencers because Scripture places that responsibility on the parents. Young folk, I understand that not everyone is called to vocational ministry, but have you ever thought about whether or not God is calling you to serve in that capacity? Making disciples is a mission young and old followers must commit themselves to.

I'm struck by the prayer of a fellow seminarian friend when he was praying for his daughter on her first birthday. This was his prayer: Lord I'd rather have my daughter serve you in a faraway land overseas than be my next door neighbor living as a pagan. His point was that he would be willing to sacrifice living in close proximity to his daughter for the sake of her serving a great cause in making disciples elsewhere. How would you feel if your child committed his or her life to full-time ministry? In our Asian American culture we're ok with our children serving as doctors, lawyers, and engineers. But are we ok with our children serving as pastors, missionaries, and clergymen?

I shared this during my Q&A as a candidate back in April, and I'll share it again. I praise God for the support I received not only from my parents but from my in-laws. Not for a second have I ever doubted my call due to the lack of support from my parents and in-laws. They've been behind me since Day 1 that I expressed my desire to pursue vocational ministry. Praise God for that. Are you willing to encourage your children to the task of making disciples as a vocation?

C. CBCOC must exercise discernment in it's support

God has given the church resources to utilize for the work of the ministry. How are we as a local church called to use these resources that he has graciously entrusted us with? What types of organizations and what types of missionaries should receive our support?

There is a plethora of groups and individuals that would be willing to receive our support. In considering whom to support, our church must prayerfully assess whether the individual and/or organization seeks to perform this task outlined in Matthew 28. Will the individual commit himself to proclaiming the gospel? What does the prospective candidate believe about the Bible? What are some doctrinal distinctives that this organization holds to? Is this person going to equip others for the work of the ministry with the help of CBCOC's support? What impact is this person's ministry going to make for eternity? These are the types of questions we as a church should be asking when vocational ministers seek our support in prayer and finances.

CONCLUSION

The mission of the church is quite simple. Jesus says, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." Church, let us be ones who make disciples both at home and abroad. May our witness expand to the ends of the earth. Jesus says he will be with us to the end of the age. Therefore the church has his authority and his presence to accomplish this grand mission. By the grace of God, may it be spoken of CBCOC that we are in the business of making disciples for Jesus Christ.