

Convictions that Define

Sermon #3: Go and Make Disciples

Matthew 28:18-20, Jonah 3

Kevin Maurice--- May 30, 2021

Good morning. My name is Kevin Maurice and I'm the youth pastor here at Grace. And I will echo everything that Ray just said about Cole and Alyssa. They've been a huge blessing to this church and to our student ministry. We're really sad to see them go, but we're also very thankful for their time here and are excited for their next step. So, we wish them the absolute best.

In our teaching time today, you can turn in your Bibles—we'll begin in Matthew 28, and I will meet you there. I recently heard about a Jewish rabbi who walked into his classroom one day and set a glass jar in the middle of his desk. In front of his students he began to put in some rocks of various sizes and shapes until finally he couldn't fit any more. And he turned to his class and said, "Is this jar full?" And everyone looked at it and said, "Yeah, that jar is full of rocks."

The rabbi went behind his desk and he picked up a cup and he began to pour in some smaller stones. And then he turned to his class again and said, "Now is the jar full?" The students were a little more hesitant to answer this time.

The rabbi went behind his desk a final time and began to pour in a cup of sand. And he turned back to his students and said, "Life is like this glass jar. We fill it with so many things, and when we see that there's any room left at all, we fill it with more and more and more. And some of the things that we fill our lives with are substantial. They're large rocks. They're significant. But so much of what we pour into our lives are very small things, even insignificant and insubstantial things. It's nothing but sand."

And that's true for all of us. Do you know what the big rocks are in your life? Because the world, the enemy, our sinful nature—we are very tempted to fill our lives with nothing but sand, an insignificant foundation. But today we're going to look at what Jesus says is perhaps the biggest rock that we're meant to build our lives upon; a rock that is worth establishing as a foundation for how we think and act and believe and live.

In Matthew 28, verses 18 through 20, Jesus has just risen from the grave. He gathers his disciples, his best friends, together, and He tells them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I’ve commanded you. And surely I am with you always, even to the very end of the age.”

Jesus is about to ascend into heaven, but before He does, He gives His followers their marching orders. And they’re actually not orders (plural); it’s a single order. It’s a command. *Go and make disciples*. That’s it. That’s the big rock in life.

And this morning we’re exploring another conviction of Grace Covenant Church, and we’ll study the Bible to better understand the mission of the Church, our purpose in this world as believers. We are disciples who make disciples.

Now if you remember back to last week, we talked about the Bible, not as a series of disconnected stories, but as a single story about what’s wrong with the world and what God has done to make things right through Jesus. That’s the story of Scripture. And as Christians, we call this story the good news or the Gospel. And to truly understand the good news of Jesus, we first have to wrestle with the bad news of our sin. And we studied the Book of Romans and we learned that we inherited sin, but through Jesus’ death and resurrection we inherit righteousness. Sin separates us from God, and so God came to us to reconcile us and to rescue us to Himself. And sin ultimately leads to death, but Jesus died for us, so now we can be fully alive here and forever.

And so, that’s the Gospel. That is the good news. And when we as a Church, as people of God—when we understand who we were—dead in sin—and now who we are, made alive in Christ, the natural progression as we follow Jesus is to tell other people about Him. The word “gospel” or “good news” in the Greek of the New Testament is the word *euangelion*, and it’s where we get the word “evangelism.” Evangelism simply means “sharing the good news.” And as a church, everything that we do here, all our ministries, Sunday mornings, our events, our camps, our retreats—all of it is with this foundational conviction in mind: go and make disciples.

A disciple is someone who follows after their master or teacher and then does what his or her master or teacher does. There was a Jewish blessing that you could speak to someone who was a disciple, and it was simply, “May you be covered in the dust of your rabbi,” meaning: May you follow your leader so closely, that as they walk along paths or hike across trails, and as they

kick up dust and dirt along the ground, you'd be following them so closely that at the end of the day you'd be covered in the dust of your rabbi.

At Grace we describe a disciple as someone who knows Jesus and is becoming more like Christ in all of life. And if we're following Jesus, we're His disciples. And He tells us, "Go, tell other people about me, and make more." That's the mission of the global, big-C Church and our church as well—guiding people to become like Christ in all of life.

C. S. Lewis wrote this: "The Church exists for nothing else but to draw others to Christ, to make them little Christs. If we are not doing that, then all of the cathedrals, clergy, mission, and sermons are simply a waste of time. God became man for no other purpose."

This is our mission. And so, why? Why is this a conviction? And together this morning we're going to explore four reasons that God sends us into His mission in the world. **We're going to study four truths about evangelism and why we're called to make disciples.**

1. Jesus Tells Us To

And the first reason is really simple. It's because Jesus tells us to. Case closed, let's call it a day, let's all go home. But if we look back at Matthew 28, Jesus says, "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. And I'm telling you, go and make disciples. Go do this." Jesus appeals to His authority and says, "Because I said so."

And parents, we do this all the time, don't we? You tell your son or your daughter, "Go clean your room, go brush your teeth, eat your vegetables." And we're on board with them wanting to know the reasons why, but at a certain point when they keep asking, "Why? Why?", what do you say? "Because I said so. Because I'm telling you to. Because I'm an authority over your life."

And the truth is, if we are following Jesus, He is our Lord. He tells us to make disciples, so let's go. This is our big rock in life. 1 John 2:6 puts it very strongly: "Whoever claims to live in Him must live as Jesus did." And so, if we claim the name of Christ, we have to ask ourselves if we're actually following Him. Are we doing what He told us to do?

So evangelism starts here—because Jesus told us to. But there's also so much more to it than that. Because God doesn't want us to only share the gospel because He said so. There's purpose, there's significance to God giving us this mission in the world. The story of Scripture is the story of God's love for people, and He calls us into that story, and it's bigger than ourselves.

It's something truly worth living for. But let's remember that evangelism isn't just a recommendation or a suggestion for certain extra spiritual Christians or people who feel called to it. It's the calling for all of us. It's the mission for us all.

Pastor John Piper says it this way: "Don't wait for a feeling or for love in order to share Christ with others. You already love your heavenly Father, and you know that other people are created by Him, but separated from Him ... so take those first steps in evangelism because you love God." We're saved from sin. We know the gospel, and God tells us to go share that with others.

Now one of my favorite stories of evangelism that shows up in the Old Testament is the Book of Jonah. You can please turn with me now to the Book of Jonah. We're going to be in chapter 3. We're going to learn more about the "why" of evangelism. We're going to see three more truths about this task, this mission, of making disciples.

Now the Book of Jonah has so much truth and depth about sharing the gospel with others, so I encourage you sometime this week to take fifteen or twenty minutes and read it for yourself, please. It's four chapters. It's an incredible book of the Bible. I'll summarize to get us to chapter 3. The book starts with God telling Jonah what He's telling us—"Go make disciples." God says to Jonah, "Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it." *Preach there.* "For their wickedness has come up against me." *Tell those people about me,* is what God says.

Jonah doesn't want to go. There are a variety of reasons. Those people are an enemy of his people group. Those people are notorious sinners. There are these cultural issues between them. There is enmity between them. They live kind of far away—they live up north. And so, I get Jonah's hesitation. If God told me to move to Norman, Oklahoma, I would also be extremely hesitant. I don't fault Jonah at all.

But the main reason that Jonah doesn't want to go on this mission from God is simply because he doesn't believe the people of Nineveh deserve it. He doesn't think they deserve God's love or grace. And Jonah's right. They don't deserve God's grace. But neither does Jonah. The reason that God tells Jonah to go share with them, to evangelize this group of people, is also our second reason for evangelism. It's because God loves and seeks sinners.

2. God Loves and Seeks Sinners

We talked about this last week. In our sinful nature, we choose evil over good. We exchange God's glory for disobedience and separation from Him. And yet, God still loves us and He sent Jesus for us. And Romans 5:8 says that, "While we were still sinners, in the midst of our sinfulness, Jesus died for us." God offers undeserving sinners His unmerited grace.

Jonah doesn't get this—at least not yet. He doesn't want to share God's grace because those people don't deserve it. But if we use the word "deserve" with "salvation," we misunderstand so much about our nature and the nature of God and His grace. Because the truth is that I don't deserve it. You don't deserve it. Grace is a gift. And the degree of hopelessness that I have for another human soul comes from not realizing just how much God has done for me. God loves and seeks after sinful people.

God gives Jonah a big rock to build his life upon. Jonah doesn't like it, so he makes his own plan and flees from God on a boat. So, God sends a storm and then God saves Jonah from the storm and from drowning by sending a fish to swallow Jonah up. Then, after three days, from inside the fish Jonah prays to God. He confesses his sin and God forgives him. And this fish spits Jonah out on dry land. And in chapter 3, Jonah's coughing up sea water, he's covered in sweat and salt and seaweed. And as soon as he's back on dry land, God speaks to him again. And He reminds him of that big rock. And the Bible says, "The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying, 'Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it the message that I tell you.'"

It's the same exact mission that He gave Jonah in chapter 1. God gives him another chance, a second opportunity. Because God doesn't give up on Jonah and God's not giving up on these people that He sent him to. Because God loves Jonah and these people.

So, finally, Jonah goes on his mission. And we learn that Nineveh is an exceedingly great city. It's a three-days' journey in width. And Jonah began to go into the city, going one day's journey. And as Jonah went, he called out, "Forty days and then Nineveh will be overthrown!" An estimate of a day's journey is about twenty-five miles. So, Nineveh is a metropolitan area about seventy-five miles wide. That's the distance from downtown Austin to San Antonio. And we're told that Jonah goes a third of the way preaching this message.

And reading this, I've always thought this was a terribly ineffective way for Jonah to tell people about God. Walking is an arduous way to travel long distances. There are more efficient modes of transportation and communication, even back then. Back in college, a buddy and I had this fun, stupid idea to walk from the state Capitol to the Alamo. It's about eighty miles, one Nineveh's worth. Just because. Nothing better to do. Classes had just ended, so we were kind of bored. So, we started at 4:00 am at the Capitol and we walked and we trudged and we hiked down I-35. And after a day, we'd made it to New Braunfels—halfway, the outlet mall. Forty miles, but not nearly far enough. And we were done. Our feet were bleeding, our knees were aching, we were sweaty and gross. So, we called it quits. We stopped right there. Now, I've told this story to students a number of times, and a few years ago, Pastor Matt's daughter Amy actually decided that it sounded like a great idea. The apple didn't fall far from that tree. So, I actually attempted this journey one more time with some of the Cassidy clan. And this time I only made it thirty miles. The point is, walking's awful. It takes a long time.

And so, I do not fault Jonah at all. He only makes it a third of the way in the city. Because when you think about it, why is God using Jonah? He is one messenger on foot—to reach these people. Aren't there better ways of getting this message to them? I mean, couldn't God descend on the city on a cloud like He does in Exodus? Couldn't He give them a sign, like a pillar of fire, or just speak to them from the heavens? Why is God asking us to go make disciples? Today, aren't there more effective ways of getting the gospel out there? Why you and why me?

3. God Wants to Use You to Share the Good News

Because, and here's our third truth of evangelism—God wants to use you to share the gospel. God wants to use you to share the good news. He's not stuck using us. God is not limited by using us. God desires and wants to utilize us in His mission in the world because God likes to work through His children, people who are also in need of grace and redemption, to be the instruments and messengers of that same grace and redemption for other people. Pastor and writer Paul David Tripp says this about God's strategy: **"God has a large toolbox, but His principal tools, His favorite tools, are His children."**

Now that can be both exciting and intimidating. Because for some of us, God will call us to make disciples like Nineveh, a place that you're scared to go or to which you don't want to go.

Some of us may become missionaries in the inner city or to countries on the other side of the world. But evangelism is not just for missionaries or professionals who are sent to other places. Jesus calls all of His disciples to be disciple-makers.

And for most of us, our mission field won't be across an ocean. It'll be across the street or across the cul-de-sac. It'll be across the apartment complex or the office building. It will be across the classroom or the hallway. And in that context, in your neighborhood, in your social circle, on your kid's baseball team, your home school group, your workplace, or your gym—wherever God has you, He wants to use you there to tell other people about Him.

Recently, as a church, we studied the Book of 1 Peter in a series called *Different*. If you weren't here for that or you missed a Sunday, I encourage you to go back and watch and listen to some of those sermons. Because the series was all about how we as disciples are called to live differently in this world. And not just for ourselves, but also in this mission of making disciples. Because in evangelism, the best way to make a difference is to be different.

That's what the Bible tells us in 1 Corinthians: "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved. Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ."

Our mission is to make disciples, and so often, what God uses to do that is someone who is simply living their life in pursuit of Him. And that's a life that looks very different and says to others, *Follow me as I follow Jesus*. As we live life with friends and family and colleagues, we simply point to God and we look for opportunities that He will give us to share the story of His good news in our lives. So, please, hear me—evangelism, especially in our lives, is not necessarily to create these giant pep rallies for God or to be the marketing engine for the kingdom of heaven. Our mission is to put Jesus on display in our lives and watch as He draws people to Himself.

Next week Pastor Matt is going to teach us a simple but profound paradigm for how to do that. How do we share our faith? How do we do evangelism? So please, do not miss next Sunday. Today what I wanted us to focus on primarily is the "why" of evangelism. Why is this a conviction? Jesus told us to. Because He loves and seeks lost people. And He wants to use us to do that.

Evangelism is sharing the Gospel with others. And I get it—that might make you nervous. Full transparency—it makes me very nervous, and this is my job. But I don't like the weight of responsibility for someone else coming to know God. Because if it all depends on me for someone coming to salvation, that is a lot of pressure. What if I mess up? What if I say the wrong thing? What if I offend someone? What if I'm just having a bad day? What if I'm not paying attention and I just miss the opportunity? That's a lot of "what ifs".

4. Salvation Belongs To God

If you've ever felt that way, just know that you're not alone. But if you've ever felt that way, write this down and remember this. It's our fourth truth about evangelism. It gives us comfort and courage when we share the Gospel with others. And the truth is that salvation belongs to God. Salvation belongs to God. Remember Matthew 28. Jesus tells us, **"Surely I am with you always."** He says, *I'm not sending you out to do this alone. You're not even going in your own power or authority. You're going in mine, and I'm with you. We can do this together.*

And you see this in Jonah's evangelism journey. Our reluctant missionary walks through a third of the city and he speaks one sentence. The Bible doesn't tell us if Jonah said anything else. All we know for sure is that he preached an eight-word sermon: "Forty days and then Nineveh will be overthrown." And look what happens: **"And the people of Nineveh believed God."** They repent and they fast and they mourn. Jonah's message even reaches the king of the city and he turns to God. And he sends out this edict to everyone that says, **"Let everyone call out to God. Let everyone turn from their evil ways ... Who knows? God may relent and turn from His anger and show us mercy and grace and compassion so that we will not perish."** And God shows grace.

This is one of the most amazing stories of repentance and turning to God in the entire Bible. And Jonah's part in it was an eight-word sermon. And let's be honest—it wasn't even a good one. I mean, his heart wasn't in it, and "Forty days and then Nineveh will be overthrown"—that's not selling any books or ratcheting up the podcast numbers.

But the people, the whole city, responds in sorrow over their sin and they turn to God and they're saved, not because of Jonah, but because of God! God is the one who worked in their hearts. And throughout the Bible we see this, how God works in people to bring them to Himself.

That's not something we can manufacture. God enjoys using us in the process, but He's the one that does the work.

And so, this means that you could give the clearest presentation of the Gospel, or you could be part of the most well-organized and well-planned ministry or mission event or trip, and God may use that to save people. It was God working. He brought salvation, not you. At the same time, you could stumble your way through sharing the Gospel, you could forget all the Bible verses and even what you plan to say, and God could use you to bring someone to Himself. And so, in evangelism, we can all relax. Because the weight is not on our shoulders. It's not on you to convince someone, it's not my job to persuade anyone. Salvation belongs to God.

We see this truth in the early church as well. In the Book of Acts, chapter 2, we're told about the first church, that: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship"-- the community—"to the breaking of bread and prayer. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they sold their possessions and belongings and distributed the proceeds to all, as any of them had need. And day by day, they attended the temple together and they broke bread in their homes, and they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved."

Just look at that final verse again: "The Lord added to their number those who were being saved." It wasn't the teaching, not the fellowship or the community, not any of the ministries or what they were doing. Those things were all a part of what God used, but it was God Himself who added to their number. And I love that. I love that, from the very beginning, the birth of the Church, God shows us that salvation is not in our hands. Salvation rests firmly in the pierced hands of Jesus Christ.

So, if you have friends, or family members, or someone who you care for who does not know Jesus, and maybe you've been praying for that person for years. Maybe you've even shared your faith with them, but it just seems like there's not any progress. Please, don't give up. It's so easy to grow disheartened and wonder if they'll ever know God's grace. Keep praying for them. Keep sharing with them. Continue in this mission of making disciples, knowing that God does the work, and He may use you to play a part.

Personally, I've been praying for my family, my mom, my dad, my brother, for years. I started following Christ my freshman year of high school. And starting that day, I remember that I was so energized and eager. I was so excited to share my faith with my family. And when it didn't happen immediately, I thought if I could just say the right words in the right order, just perfectly, like it was some kind of incantation, then my family would believe in Jesus too. They would know God and they would turn to Him and they would be saved. And so, at fifteen years old I started sharing with them. I'd write little notes on sticky notes or cards, Bible verses about God's love for us, and leave them in my mom's office or in her car. Until one day she asked me simply, "Hey, please stop." I'd take my little brother to go get something to eat and try to share my faith with him, and one day he said, "Hey, thanks, but no thanks. I'm an atheist. So, I'll take the food, but let's stop talking about this." My dad sometimes enjoys the conversation about faith, but he prefers to keep things pretty general and more spiritual rather than anything about Jesus.

And it's been twenty years of that. And I keep praying, but I'll just be honest with you. There are many days where it's hard to, and there are many days when I don't. Because at this point it feels rather impossible. I've been a Christians for two decades and I've wanted to, and I have, I've tried to share the Gospel with my family. But my mom still doesn't know God. And my dad and my brother are still not following Christ. And as much as I would have loved that one-day salvation story like in the Book of Jonah or in the early church, that's not what has happened.

And if it's up to me to save my family, then I would be hopeless. So, thank God it's not up to me. I trust that God loves them and cares about them more than I do. So, I continue to pray and look for opportunities and moments to share with them. And I remind myself that salvation belongs to God. And He chooses to use us in the mission of evangelism because He seeks after sinful people that He loves.

Go and make disciples. This is a conviction. It's a foundation for this church and for us as Christians. It's a simple progression—when God calls you to Himself, He also sends you to be a disciple who makes disciples. That's who we are.

As we closed last Sunday, I asked you to write on a piece of paper, "What's wrong with the world?" And I asked you to pause and reflect on your own sinful nature and the state of your

soul without God's grace. And beneath that question, I asked you to consider writing the confession, "Dear God, I am."

And if you brought your paper back today, great. If not, or if you missed last week, no worries, do this sometime today. On the top of a piece of paper I want you to write the question, "Who is a disciple who makes disciples?" And take some time to reflect on the Gospel and what God has done in your life. How are you following Jesus? What does that look like for you day to day? And then begin to think of some of the faces and the names of people that you care for, people that God loves even more than you do, people who may not know the good news, friends, family, a group of people, a city, or even a country.

And as you do this, be thinking, "Who is a disciple that makes disciples?" And beneath that question I want you to write those same four words: "Dear God, I am." You can fold up that piece of paper and keep it with you. Put it in your Bible, put it your purse or in your wallet. Keep it to remind you of who you are in Christ.

We are called into this mission of evangelism in our families, and in the people that God has placed in our lives. We're disciples making disciples in our church, serving in ministry with the people in this community right here that God has surrounded you with. We are all missionaries in our smaller spheres and worlds—at work, in our friend groups, our neighborhoods. And we are commanded by Jesus to make disciples in the world, wherever He might call us to.

And so, Grace, let's take this big rock and let's build our lives on this. Let's encourage one another in faith as we become more like Christ in all of life. And let's be disciples who make disciples.

Will you please pray with me?

God, we thank You for who You are. God, we thank You that You love us, that You came to us and for us; that while we were still sinners, You died for us, so that we might know You both here in this world and forever.

And God, as we come to know You more and more in our lives, we pray that You will help us to know our mission in this world, our mission as Your children to tell others about You.

God, I'd pray that even now You'd begin to stir in our hearts and open these doors for us to simply begin a conversation or pray for someone. God, help us to not grow disheartened. Help

us to pray, trusting in You, knowing that salvation belongs to You. Father, we love You and we praise You. In Your name we pray. Amen.