

## ‘Teaching the nations.’

A family moved into a new town and settled in well but a few weeks later after a long night they all overslept one morning, which meant their six-year-old daughter missed her school bus. The father, though late for work himself, had to drive her to school. The problem was he didn't know the way, so he asked his six-year-old daughter to give him directions.

They drove down several streets before she told him to turn the first time, they drove down several more streets before she indicated for him to take another turn. This went on for 20 minutes and when they finally reached the school, the father realised that the school was only a short distance from their home. As you can imagine the father was very annoyed, and so, he asked his daughter why she'd led him all over the place. The six-year-old replied, ‘Daddy, that's the way the school bus goes, it's the only way I know.’

Now when it comes to making disciples, the Bible teaches us there is only one way of doing that and that's Jesus' way. During the life of Christ, there were three types of disciples, you had the learners, pupils, superficial followers, the multitude. You also had the body of believers who accepted Jesus as their Master. And finally, you had the twelve disciples whom Jesus also called apostles. Peter, James, John, Andrew, Bartholomew, James the younger, Judas, Thaddeus, Matthew, Philip, Simon the Zealot and Thomas.

These disciples were all handpicked by Jesus for one specific reason, to teach the world around them about who Jesus was and is and what He will do. Jesus spent more than three years making disciples, teaching and training His chosen twelve who would go on to teach and train others.

And so, when Jesus says to His disciples in **Matthew 28:18-20** ‘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 and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’

Jesus is saying it's impossible to teach anyone, if there's no personal contact with them. Paul puts it this way in **Romans 10:14+15** ‘How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent?’ You see God could have shouted the message from the clouds what people needed to do to be right with Him but He didn't. He sent His Son, **why?** Because He knew the importance of personal contact with people.

Now the **KJV** uses the phrase, ‘teach all nations’ in **Matthew 28:19**. And the Greek word for ‘teach’ or ‘disciple’ is the word, ‘**manthano**’ which basically means to learn. And please know that you don't need some high qualification to teach, like you need to teach in our schools or university today. To teach someone in Biblical terms means to help someone to learn. In other words, you are the teacher and the disciple is the student.

Jesus says to make a disciple you must have personal contact with people in order to teach them, but **teach them what?** We teach them about the Gospel, the good news, that Jesus died, was buried and rose again in order that they may have their sins forgiven and receive eternal life. Paul says it so clearly in **1 Corinthians 15:1-4** ‘Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel, you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.’

You see loved ones, for years, this is where a lot of Christians have made a mess of it. They meet someone and teach them the Gospel and then they teach them about all the church doctrine and how the denominational world has got it all wrong and then after all that they finally baptise them.

Is that what Jesus had in mind? I mean who gets to set the standard of how much a person needs to know before they can become a Christian? How much did the Ethiopian Eunuch know about Jesus before he became a Christian? How much did the Philippian jailer know about Jesus before he became a Christian?

Listen, every good teacher knows if you want to teach any subject, you have to teach the basic foundations of the subject first.

The Hebrew writer tells us if we don't understand the basics, we won't understand the deeper things concerning our faith. **Hebrews 5:12+13** 'In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness.'

And notice the order of Jesus' words in **Matthew 28:19+20** 'Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.'

**First**, He says, we must 'go', we can't sit around in our nice building hoping that someone will just wander in. We really need to get out of the mindset of thinking, 'if we just bring people into this building they'll become Christians.' No! Jesus said you've got to go into your world and make personal contact with the people in your world. **Secondly**, Jesus says, we've got to go and speak to those people in our world about Him, to make disciples. We have to preach the Gospel of His death for our sins and His resurrection for our hope in order that people might be saved. **Thirdly**, He says, we have to baptise those disciples in water, into a relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And **then**, He says, teach them to obey Him and teach them everything concerning His teachings.

I remember a friend and I were studying with this young woman many years ago, and she decided she wanted to be baptised. However, before she did, my friend told her that she must attend worship every week but because she worked one Sunday every month, she never became a Christian because she said she couldn't attend every week. And the reason I told you that story was because afterwards I spoke to that brother and told him, he didn't have any right to lay down any terms and conditions for that woman.

None of us have got any right to set out terms and conditions for becoming a Christian when Jesus has already told us what they are. Jesus says, it's simple, **do they believe who I claimed to be? Do they believe that I died, was buried and rose again for them? Are they willing to turn from their old lifestyle and follow Me? Are they willing to confess my Name as Lord of their lives?** And if the answer is 'yes' to all of those questions, then we have no right to demand anything else of them.

We've been doing it the wrong way around for years. Christians with good intentions have come along and said, 'we'll teach you the good news but we'll also teach you about marriage and divorce, we need to teach you about creation and premillennialism too, before you decide to become a Christian'. No, loved ones, we've to teach the simple Gospel message and then after they've been baptised, we've to teach them everything else. Ask yourself loved ones, **are you trying to convert people into the church or are you trying to make disciples for Jesus?**

You see loved ones, there are times when even the best of us can get it wrong. And we get it wrong when we try to be too clever with the message. Just like the apostle Paul did in **Acts 17** when he was in Athens. He was trying to take on all the so-called wise men of the day by even quoting from their own poets. **But have you ever noticed that Paul never once mentions Jesus by name?**

Paul preached everything except the Gospel, no wonder they said to him in **Acts 17:32**, 'We want to hear you again on this subject.' Now that reads in English as if they're interested in what he has to say, but in the Greek language, they're basically saying, 'don't call us, we'll call you' and we all know what that means **don't we?** Paul messed up because he never preached the simple Gospel message and he tried to take on the scholars with his own intellect. And because of his approach, he only had a few converts. Keep the message simple loved ones and learn from Paul's mistake.

Now please don't think you can't share that simple Gospel message with others because you can. **Do you remember when you became a Christian? Do you remember the person who shared the good news with you? Do you remember Romans 10:15? 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!'** You understood the simple message that Jesus died, was buried and rose again for you. And the good news was, if you did spiritually what Jesus physically, you can get to heaven.

**Do you remember that?** Good because the only qualification you need to teach others is your very own conversion story. **How were you introduced to Jesus? What did you do to be saved and what are the results since you've had a relationship with Jesus?** But let me ask you, **have you got 'beautiful feet' which takes the good news of Jesus to others?** I'm so glad that someone went out of their way to tell me about Jesus because that good news literally saved my life.

We don't have to know all of the Bible and what it means. We don't need to know everything to do with sanctification and justification. We simply need to tell others what we were told, so that they will believe and go and tell others what they were told.

But who exactly is it we are to teach? **Matthew 28:19** 'Therefore go and make disciples of all nations.' Someone once told me that, 'everyone on earth has got the right to refuse the Gospel at least once in their lives.' Is there anyone exempt from hearing the good news of Jesus? No! I don't care if you're an outright crook or someone who is a highly-qualified professional. I don't care if you're a homeless person or the prime minister of Great Britain. I don't care if you live in Iraq, Mexico, Pakistan or the Ukraine. The point is the Gospel is for everyone because 'all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God', **Romans 3:23**. And none of us have the right to pick and choose who we're going to share the Gospel with.

That word, 'nations' is 'ethnos' in Greek and its where we get our English word, 'ethnic'. Jesus wants us to make disciples in every ethnic group of the world. That's why He spoke to the Samaritan woman in **John 4** when no one else would. That's why Peter ended up in the house of a Gentile in **Acts 10**. That's why Paul went to Macedonia to speak to the Greeks in **Acts 16**.

And when we think about the word 'world' we automatically think about the entire planet, maybe we should be thinking about the people who are in 'our world'. Our non-Christian family members, our neighbours and friends, our work colleagues. And loved ones, surely this is easier to do today than it's ever been with the new modern technologies we have at our disposal? Yes, there's a place for leafletting and for standing on the street corner proclaiming the Gospel. But how hard is it to call, text, email, tweet or Facebook someone to tell them the good news?

Why is it we find it easier to invite people to a building which can't save anyone, rather than inviting them to a relationship with Jesus who can save them? My theory is that we're afraid of offending people, we're afraid of losing friendships and being rejected.

After Jesus, had been teaching the Pharisees and the teachers of law about their traditions and vain worship in **Matthew 15**, the disciples come to Jesus and say in **Matthew 15:12** 'Do you know that when the Pharisees heard this saying they were offended?' Do you think that Jesus knew His words were offensive to them? Of course, He did, that's why they were determined to kill Jesus by hook or by crook.

After Stephen gave the Sanhedrin a history lesson in **Acts 7**, he goes on to say to them in **Acts 7:51-53** 'You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him—you who have received the law that was given through angels but have not obeyed it.' Do you think that Stephen knew His words were offensive? Of course, he did, he saw that they were furious and they were gnashing their teeth at him, that's why they ended up stoning him to death.

Loved ones, we all have to decide what is more important to us, losing a friendship or gaining a family member! Giving someone the opportunity to be saved or watch them go to hell! Can you imagine what that would be like? Seeing someone being condemned forever, simply because we didn't have the courage to tell them about Jesus.

And please remember that you are responsible for teaching the good news but you're not responsible for them becoming Christians. This is something we learn from the very first Gospel meeting ever held in **Acts 2**. After Peter preached his sermon, many people believed and became Christians and **Acts 2:41** says, 'Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.' Some commentators suggest there would have been around 250 thousand people present on the day of Pentecost and others suggest over a million people would have been present. But how many believed Peter's message? Around 3000. Which tells us a whole lot more people refused to listen to what he Peter said.

And let me ask, who added them to the church? Peter, one of the other apostles! **Acts 2:47** 'And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.' Paul teaches the same principle over in **1 Corinthians 3:6-7** 'I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So, neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.'

Loved ones, we're not responsible for making Christians, we're responsible for making disciples. And I know some of you struggle with this concept because you're concerned for people's souls. And it's good that you are concerned for people's souls but you have to let God do, what only He can do. You plant, allow someone else to water, if you don't get the chance to but let God do the growing and adding.

Now I've noticed that no matter how up-beat you teach, no matter how much Gospel good news you lay on some people, some people are absolutely determined to see the 'dour' side of life. 'Dour' is a word, the Scottish like to use a lot when we're talking to someone who is always filled with doom and gloom. These are the people who are thoroughly committed to negative thinking, the kind of people who would challenge the most cheerful good news message.

They remind me of the story I read about the waitress who couldn't get a smile out of her customer for love nor money. The old woman was dour, depressed and dejected all through dinner despite the food being really good. As the lady paid her bill and was leaving, the waitress said, 'have a nice day!' and the woman responded snappishly, 'I'm sorry, but I've made other plans!'

The point is you can share the good news with all the enthusiasm in the world, but you can't take personal responsibility for people's decisions. That was Jesus' point in the parable of sower, **Matthew 13:19-23** 'When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path. The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful. But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.'

We have to accept that people will have different reactions to the Gospel message, some will listen but won't be interested. Some will listen and will be happy but will leave whenever someone has a go at them for being a Christian. Some will listen but will fall away as soon as life gets tough. And then there will be some who will listen and will be happy and will go on to make other disciples. Loved ones, the Gospel is to be preached and shared with the world, no matter who they are or where they are from or what their response might be.

**Fritz Kreisler** was a world-famous violinist, and he earned a fortune with his concerts and compositions, but he generously gave most of it away. So, when he discovered an exquisite violin on one of his trips, he wasn't able to buy it. Later, having raised enough money to meet the asking price, he returned to the seller, hoping to purchase the beautiful instrument. But to his great dismay it had been sold to a collector. Kreisler made his way to the new owner's home and offered to buy the violin. The collector said it had become his prized possession and he would not sell it. As you can imagine he was deeply disappointed.

But as he was about to leave when he had an idea and so he asked the new owner, 'could I play the instrument once more before it is consigned to silence?' Permission was granted, and the great virtuoso filled the room with such heart-moving music that the collector's emotions were deeply stirred. He went on to say, 'I have no right to keep that to myself,' 'it's yours, Mr. Kreisler. Take it into the world, and let people hear it.' You see the message of the Gospel is beautiful and sounds wonderful to those who hear it for the first time. But we have no right to selfishly keep that message to ourselves, we must take it into our world and let people hear it.

If you're not a Christian today, then please know this, Jesus loves you so much He was willing to take the penalty that your sins deserve. He died for you, so that He can forgive you for every ungodly thing you've ever said, thought and done. And He rose again three days later, so He could offer you eternal life.

Let me leave you with the words of a **Chris Rice** song, it's called, 'Come to Jesus.'

'Weak and wounded sinner, Lost and left to die,  
O, raise your head, for Love is passing by,  
Come to Jesus, Come to Jesus,  
Come to Jesus and live!'