

As You Are Going...



AS YOU ARE GOING

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How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of the messenger who brings good news, the good news of peace and salvation, the news that the God of Israel reigns! (Isaiah 52:7)

The prophet used a Hebrew idiom—a symbolic word picture—that may seem strange to us. But travel back in time with me, to a day when there was no internet, no cell phones, no trans-continental landlines, no telegraph... if you wanted to get a message to someone, you had to carry it to them, or hire a runner who would do that for you. (And we think maintaining communication is hard today!)

Especially when waiting for news of an expected outcome—a treaty-signing, an expected birth, the outcome of a battle, the release of a prisoner—the wait was long and anticipation was heavy. To see the arrival of a runner—a messenger—intensified the suspense. Every foot-fall of their approach matched the pounding of your heart.

Perhaps it's like awaiting a letter of acceptance to a university, or to the confirmation of a new position of employment. Tearing open the envelope to read... good news!

How beautiful it is to receive good news! Especially the good news of peace and salvation, of God's victory! That is the feeling the prophet described in the language of his day. We can relate to that feeling (even without running messengers).

After Jesus was raised from the dead, He arranged to meet with His disciples in Galilee. He showed Himself alive to them repeatedly, with many undeniable proofs. Before His departure and ascension to the throne of Heaven, He also gave them final instructions for carrying His work forward, until He would return again in His new role as King of kings.

Below is a composite from the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Acts that gives a fuller picture of the last days the Risen Christ spent with His disciples.

Jesus came and told His disciples, "I have been given all authority in Heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Still later He appeared to the eleven disciples as they were eating together. He rebuked them for their stubborn unbelief because they refused to believe those who had seen Him after He had been raised from the dead. And then He told them, “Go into all the world and preach the Good News to everyone. Anyone who believes and is baptized will be saved. But anyone who refuses to believe will be condemned. These miraculous signs will accompany those who believe: They will cast out demons in My name, and they will speak in new languages. They will be able to handle snakes with safety, and if they drink anything poisonous, it won’t hurt them. They will be able to place their hands on the sick, and they will be healed.”

“And now I will send the Holy Spirit, just as My Father promised. But stay here in the city until the Holy Spirit comes and fills you with power from heaven.”

So when the apostles were with Jesus, they kept asking Him, “Lord, has the time come for You to free Israel and restore our kingdom?”

He replied, “The Father alone has the authority to set those dates and times, and they are not for you to know. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be My witnesses, telling people about Me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

The Great Commission

This passage unfolds what we generally refer to as the Great Commission—that is, the orders Christ gave to His people to carry out *our part* of His mission: to bring the Good News to the rest of the world.

The *extent* of the Great Commission is expressed in two words in the text I’ve just read:

- *Everyone* – There is no one on the planet for whom the Good News is not designed.
2 Peter 3:9 *The Lord isn’t really being slow about His promise (to return), as some people think. No, He is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent.*
Every human is a candidate, for whom Christ died.
- *Everywhere* – There is nowhere on the planet for which the Good News is not intended.
Romans 10:13 *“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”*
Into all the world.

The *strategy* of Christ’s mission is expressed in three words from our text:

- *Witnesses* – People who know Christ personally and who will describe their experiences with Him.
1 John 1:1 *We proclaim to you the One who existed from the beginning, whom we have*

heard and seen. We saw Him with our own eyes and touched Him with our own hands. He is the Word of life. ² This One who is life itself was revealed to us, and we have seen Him. And now we testify and proclaim to you that He is the One who is eternal life. He was with the Father, and then He was revealed to us.

- **Make disciples** – Our objective in telling our experiences is that others may share in similar relationship with Christ.

1 John 1:3 We proclaim to you what we ourselves have actually seen and heard so that you may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ.

- **Preach** – Verbally proclaiming the Message with story and Scripture.

1 Corinthians 1:21 Since God in His wisdom saw to it that the world would never know Him through human wisdom, He has used our foolish preaching to save those who believe.

So, if Christ died for all and canceled the judgment that was against us, why has it been more than 2,000 years and He still has not returned?

The Book of Acts begins with these words:

Acts 1:1 In my first book I told you, Theophilus, about everything Jesus began to do and teach ² until the day He was taken up to heaven after giving His chosen apostles further instructions through the Holy Spirit.

Disciples are made by other disciples who witness and preach to those who haven't yet heard or understood the Good News. Jesus' work is now in our hands.

Jesus said:

John 20:21 As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.

Where's the Bottleneck?

Paul asked:

Romans 10:14 But how can they call on Him to save them unless they believe in Him? And how can they believe in Him if they have never heard about Him? And how can they hear about Him unless someone tells them? ¹⁵ And how will anyone go and tell them without being sent? That is why the Scriptures say, "How beautiful are the feet of messengers who bring good news!"

Jesus made us a promise:

John 15:26 "But I will send you the Advocate—the Spirit of truth. He will come to you from the Father and will testify all about Me.

But that promise included (in the next verse) a command:

John 15:27 And you must also testify about Me because you have been with Me from the beginning of My ministry.

Building the Church by raising up disciples is a *partnership*—between God the Holy Spirit and Christ’s followers. *HE* will testify about Christ. And *YOU* also must testify about Christ.

If there is a bottleneck, it is not God who is slow. It is we who fill our lives with distractions and excuses. Our love for this world interferes with our love for Jesus in so many ways.

Yet again, it is not perfection that God is reaching to us for, but participation. Will you do *your share* of the work? How can we change? How can we do better at this work?

When Jesus promised to send us the Holy Spirit, He asked us to make Him a promise in return:

Acts 1:4 “Do not leave Jerusalem until the Father sends you the gift He promised, as I told you before. ⁵ John baptized with water, but in just a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

Acts 1:8 “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be My witnesses, telling people about Me everywhere.”

Let’s revisit those questions from Paul:

Romans 10:14 But how can they call on Him to save them unless they believe in Him? And how can they believe in Him if they have never heard about Him? And how can they hear about Him unless someone tells them? ¹⁵ And how will anyone go and tell them without being sent? That is why the Scriptures say, “How beautiful are the feet of messengers who bring good news!”

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. In other words, if you ask Jesus to save you, to deliver you, to heal you, to restore you—He will. He is willing!

But how can they call on Him to save them unless they believe in Him?

Who would you ask for help, if you didn’t trust them? People need all kinds of help today that God has promised to provide, but they don’t know if He’s a promisekeeper, so they don’t ask Him. If you trust Him, others may ask you to ask Him on their behalf. But no one else can be saved by your prayers. Salvation is a one-to-one arrangement: every *one* who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. It’s a personal call. It’s a personally trusting call.

So how will they get that faith?

And how can they believe in Him if they have never heard about Him?

Romans 10:17 So faith comes from hearing, that is, hearing the Good News about Christ.

That’s how faith comes—at the beginning, and all the way through. If you have a lack of faith, it’s because you have a paucity of the Message of Christ. If you want your faith to grow, then

you must grow your hearing of the Word of God. (NOTE: Not your *knowledge* of it, but your *hearing* of it.) When it comes to faith, “learning” is overrated; it’s more listening that you need.

And how can they hear about Him unless someone tells them?

Whether by the internet, television, or radio...

Whether is a printed book, or magazine, or newspaper...

Whether one-on-one, or in a classroom, or in a stadium...

Someone must tell them. Will it be you? It could be you. Perhaps it could *only* be you.

And how will anyone go and tell them without being sent?

In Matthew 28:19, Jesus said, “*Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you.*”

Let me illuminate this verse with a brief word study.

First of all, *nations* does not mean geopolitical states. It comes from the Greek root *ethnos*, which simply means people, especially of another tribe. This is in keeping with the goal of reaching all the world.

Next, the word *go* appears to be a command, but it is not. Grammatically, it is a passive participle, which would be better translated “as you are going.” The passive aspect of this verb is that it requires no special volition, it is simply what you naturally do (as I said)—unless you are confined to the bed, you go places. So, as you are going, wherever you are going, *make disciples* (that is an imperative verb).

The other two verbs, *baptizing* and *teaching*, are active participles. That means they do require intentionality, and they are a subset of the main verb, the imperative, *make disciples*. In other words, they express *how* we make disciples: baptizing and teaching—not simply the acts of baptizing and teaching, but their results. *Baptizing* is the initiation into the fellowship of the believers, it is the commencement of spiritual belonging. *Teaching* is the training in sound doctrine that clarifies the life of faithfulness.

So, Jesus Himself has sent us to tell others about Him, as we live our lives.

Who Are You Telling?

But who are you telling? And if those you’re telling aren’t listening, perhaps there’s a reason for their reluctance that *you* can do something about.

Whether you're an ordinary missionary (simply making disciples as you go), or a vocational missionary (going elsewhere on assignment to make disciples)...

To have credibility, you must be trained and empowered.

To have wisdom and energy, you must be upheld in prayer.

To have sustainability, you must be supported with finances and materials and helpers.

These things are true, whether you're crossing the street or crossing the ocean.

The final thing our passage reveals is the *necessity* of the Mission. Of course, it is necessary for all people to be saved, but that goes unrecognized by many. Improvement is their highest goal, which they expect to achieve either by trying hard or by happy accident.

The “bad news” is that all humanity is poisoned by sin and already stands condemned for it.

Romans 3:10 As the Scriptures say, “No one is righteous—not even one. ¹¹ No one is truly wise; no one is seeking God. ¹² All have turned away; all have become useless. No one does good, not a single one.”

Romans 3:23 For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard.

Galatians 3:22 But the Scriptures declare that we are all prisoners of sin, so we receive God's promise of freedom only by believing in Jesus Christ.

John 3:18 “Anyone who believes in Him is not condemned, but anyone who does not believe is already condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the One and Only Son of God.”

But this is not the emphasis of today's passage. Rather, it is the necessity of every one of Christ's witnesses—what we need more than anything else in order to be effective in the mission: the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus promised that we would receive *power* when the Holy Spirit came upon us, and that we should *wait* before working until the power came.

We tend to minimize what Jesus maximizes, and maximize what He minimizes. We think appearance is more important than character. We think justice is more important than mercy. We think knowledge is more important than integrity. We think our wit and strength are sufficient to do the work of God. They are not.

We *require* the power of the Holy Spirit every day. I don't mean that you have to feel something spiritual every day. His power is not a feeling. His power may give you a feeling, but that feeling is not the power. And His power can work when you feel nothing at all.

When I can't feel Him, He's working
When I can't see Him, He's working
He never stops, He never stops working
He never stops, He never stops working
(Lyrics from Way Maker)

The "power of the God" is simply the Holy Spirit in action. The Holy Spirit's activity is needed to bring awareness of the sinfulness of sin. His activity is needed to awaken faith in the heart of an unbeliever. His activity is needed to open the understanding to the Word of God.

We need the Holy Spirit's activity to pour God's love into our hearts, to put God's wisdom into our minds, to put God's words into our mouths, to make our service effective. We must have His power in order to make disciples as we are going.

You may only have to go across the street, but you will have to go somewhere. But that's okay, because that's what you do, almost every day—you go somewhere. You go to the grocery store. You go to the gas station. You go to the doctor's office. You go to the post office. You go to the park. You go to church.

As you are going, are you making disciples? How beautiful are your feet? As you approach, are others made glad?

If your presentation of the Good News makes others tense up or shut down, you may need to revise your method, especially that part about empowerment.

Remember, people don't need to know what you know; they need to hear what Jesus means to you.

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the good news of peace and salvation, the news that Jesus Christ reigns!*