

From the Pulpit of the Japanese Baptist Church of North Texas
September 23, 2018

Becoming a Disciple of Christ
Matthew 11:28-30

11:28 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

11:29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

11:30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

1. Great Commandment

Every single person was created with meaning and purpose by God. Some people might say, “There is no meaning or purpose for our life.” But we cannot live without them. Even those people set the meaning and purpose of their life at some point and live for them. However, the meaning and purpose that set by us is very unstable and fragile.

The meaning and purpose of our life are given by God, not decided by ourselves. They are revealed in the Bible so that we can find it if we ask to the Bible. We do not need hard works to find it. If so, most of people can not find it in their life. It is too late to find it at the moment of their death. We should be able to find it when we are young and we live for it. If we do it, I think we can be satisfied at the end of our life.

Regarding the meaning and purpose of our life, there is a clear word in the Bible. The word is called “Great Commandment.” In Matthew 22:37, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and

first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

There is an order for “love” described in the “Great Commandment.” According to Jesus, the first is the “love for God”, and the second is the “love for neighbors.” “Love for God” and “love for neighbors” are closely related and can not be separated. However, “love for God” shall be greater than “love for neighbors.” Because the love of God wins over the love of human being. It is because the sacred love, the love being on the different level.

If we don’t understand this, the love of God or the love for God and the love of human beings would be combined, and the love of God is no longer first. When the “love for God” is not first, the second “love of neighbors” does not work since it does not have a foundation.

We are sinful so that our love is love of ourselves. We might help others; however, we do this because we think that might be benefit to us. We calculate the result for our benefit. In other words, we do that in order to satisfy ourselves. This is not pure love that God seeks in us. For we, sinful human beings, shall receive the love of God given by the Holy Spirit in order to live for the true love. In Romans 5:5, “Because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”

What kind of love is this love given by the Holy Spirit? According to Romans 5:8, “But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” It is the love that Christ died for us. If we understand the love, how can we not love God?

Food bank, the volunteer service for the afflicted people from

disaster, various self-help groups for suffering addictions, that are the performance of the “love for neighbors,” have been done by the people who are filled with the “love for God.” I know a church which has a baking and hand craft classes. The products of the classes will be used when they visit the elders who stays in their houses. In another church, the members start making the hand craft products and bring them to the nursery homes for the Christmas caroling. Because of the love for God, they can carry out the love for neighbors.

There is no better life than the life with the love for God. There is no deeper life than the life with the love for neighbors. If you find the meaning of your life in which you are loved by God and love God, you truly have a happy life.

2. Great Commission

A mission called as “Great Commission” is given to us based on the love to God and the love to neighbors, and also to put the love into practice. It is the Jesus’ word in Matthew 28:18-20. “And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

What kind of mission have we received? Many of us will say, “Great Commission means outreaching. We are doing various gatherings and events, and people come to the church.” But “Great Commission” does not talk about meetings, events, or any other activities in the Church. What did Jesus actually commit to the

disciples who remained on the earth? Once again, let's read the words of Jesus.

“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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” The main instruction in this sentence is “to make disciples.” Four commands seems to be “go,” “make disciples,” “baptize,” and “teach.” But in the original language, they were “go,” “baptize,” and “teach” in the form of a participle. The main verb is “to make disciples.” “Go,” “baptize,” and “teach” are ways to make people disciples.

From this, we can see that the mission that Jesus gave to us is more than spreading Christianity as a religion or promoting the church. It is not to increase a person who favors Christianity, but to create and nurture a follower of Christ who is faithful to Christ.

The bakery makes bread and the shoe store makes shoes. So what does the church makes? The disciple of Jesus Christ. It is to make disciples that we speak the gospel to the people, lead them to faith and baptism. And those who were baptized will learn from the Lord and abide in Him. The church where many people gather and many activities are performed are not necessarily the churches breathing the mission of Christ. It can be said that the church where the disciples of Christ is born one after another, is the church that practices “Great Commission.”

The “Great Commission” is too heavy to carry and too difficult to achieve. But that doesn't mean you're allowed to dilute it or replace it with something else. If you do that, the church will no longer be a church. Not only that, but many people who are supposed to become

disciples of Christ are lost in the church. No matter how difficult the mission is, and even if it is a goal, we must work towards it and aim to improve it, to live up to the mission we have received from Christ.

3. Great Invitation

So how can we become a person who produces the disciples of Christ? To do that, we ourselves must first become disciples of Christ. I got consultation a person who is not baptized yet. The person said, “I’d like let my children baptized.” At that time I said, “That is an excellent wish, to do so, first of all, you should be baptized.” It is the parent’s responsibility to guide children who were baptized. Especially for little children. Children should learn the Bible, prayer, and praise from their parents. If parents are not baptized, how can they do that? If you come to church and touch the wonder of Jesus Christ, it is natural that you want to recommend it to others. However, if the person were baptized, learned the Bible, and became a disciple of Christ, the person can suggest faith to other with the power. We can help other people to become disciples of Christ by becoming disciples of Christ.

Today’s verses is an invitation to become a disciple of Christ. Today, I referred to “Great Commandment” and “Great Commission.” Matthew 11: 28-30 can be called, “Great Invitation.”

Becoming a disciple of Christ is coming to Christ. It begins by taking down the burden of sin there. A person says, “the greatest burden of mankind is sin.” All of us are dedicated to the burden of sin. The Lord Jesus said to us, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” How could the Lord say so? That is

because Jesus Christ took on all the burden of our sins on that cross.

Then, when you come to Jesus once, do you have no need to come back later? It's not. We have taken down the burden of sin, became free, were forgiven our sins, and gained peace. But, as long as we live in the world, our fight against sin will continue. There will be rain and wind in our journey of life. Victory and peace are in the Lord Jesus, so we come to the Lord as many times as we can. No, we will stay in the Lord and walk with Him.

Jesus expressed this in this words. "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me." We left the burden of sin to the Lord. You do not need to take that burden anymore. However, it does not mean that you will carry nothing. You will carry Jesus' "yoke" instead of a burden. A "Yoke" is a connection bar between two animals, for attaching such as plows to use for cultivating the field. It does not mean we will bear another burden from Jesus. Rather, Lord carries with us, indeed, what we must take alone.

If a weak cow must cultivate a large field, the cow will soon get tired. But how about connecting with a strong cow by "yoke" and plowing the field together? Cow with weak power can also fulfill the duty of the day without much being tired. Jesus supports us by shoving with us what we can not burden alone. It means that we, who the burden of sin were taken away, also became to live for carrying the mission of "Great Commission." Moreover, to complete this mission, it is not done by ourselves alone, but Jesus owes the other side of "yoke." To bear the "yoke" of Jesus does not mean carrying something heavy stuff from Jesus, but to ask Jesus carries what we should carry.

Jesus told us, “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me.” Indeed, the word “disciple” was born from the word “to learn.” Therefore, “disciples” has the meaning of “someone who are learning.” Released from this world’s “yoke,” and lives in the mission given by Jesus. That means to become a “disciple.” As such, when we strive to become disciples, we can become to lead another person to Christ and bring forth another disciples.

The way to become a disciple, or the step to response “Great Commission,” requires faith and training. However, it is not something that only special people can do. Jesus will walk that way together. Jesus gives us the power to fulfill to be done the mission. As Jesus promised saying, “for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls,” the way to learn from Jesus, the way to become a disciple of Christ is the way to take an advantage of our souls.

(Prayer)

God, the Father, the Lord Jesus gave us the mission “to make disciples of all citizens.” However, at the same time, the Lord promised us that He takes our “yoke” with us and takes over this mission. Please, make us disciples of Christ and make this mission the purpose of our life. We pray this in the name of the Lord Jesus.