



To the Ends of the Earth

Part 1 – Making Disciples of all Nations

Pastor Ted Cunningham

We're starting a brand-new series and here's what we're asking and praying for. That we would have the heart of God for the whole world. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son. And that we would take the gospel to the nations of the earth. We've never done a mission series like this at our church, but for the next couple of weeks, we're going to be focusing on global missions. Our prayer is for those in our church family, that our hearts will grow, and we will have the eyes of God. We'll see the world through the eyes of God and not through our cable news networks. Can I get an amen on that? We want the heart of God for all the nations of the earth. And when we turn on the news, our first thought wouldn't be political, but our first thought would be the gospel, and that we would have a heart for the people of whatever nation is being discussed.

Part of this message today is what we do every single week and that is we take an offering at our church. If you are new to our church, know that 13% of everything that comes in today goes to missions here in our nation and to the ends of the earth, and to missionaries around the world. We're grateful for your generosity and we're going to ask that you continue to give well. We're going to encourage greater generosity for many of you as we talk about what our role as a church is in taking the gospel to the ends of the earth.

We're going to jump right in with the Great Commission. If you've grown up in church, you've probably heard it said, "This is the Great Commission not the Great Suggestion." If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, you are called. We read in Matthew 28... These are the words of Jesus, your savior.

19 "Therefore go and make disciples..." And we're going to start here **"...of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit..."** Bringing them into the family of God. **20 "...and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."** Not just winning people to Jesus, but discipling people to be more like Jesus. **"And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."**

So, we're going to make some observations, like five observations about the Great Commission. We're going to come back into this text in a moment for more context, but as we talk about the Great Commission, this week and next and your role in it individually, our role in it corporately. What is our responsibility?

1. The Great Commission challenges each and every one of us to have a heart for all nations. I hate that we're ending the Olympics. I've been watching the Olympics. Who has been watching the Olympics?

I always like to watch the Olympics and figure out which sport I should have competed in had I had the time to really train for it. Amy and I sat down two weeks ago and we watched the opening ceremonies. I love the opening ceremonies. I don't know why but I get emotional when we watch the opening ceremonies. You're thinking, *They just keep walking in*. But I just love the flags of the nations coming in. And then they always give statistics like how many are in this country, how many athletes are competing from this country. And then you know we're all waiting for our country, so our flag comes out and we're all cheering for team USA. We're ready to cheer and just wipe up all the other nations with the metal count. And it's good, right? This is what I love. At the Olympics, we're cheering for our nation, but I also love to learn about all the other nations that are walking through because these are people that Christ died for. And we are to be taking the gospel to all the nations of the earth.

As I was preparing this series, I thought about when the Chinese walked through and I just paused. I hope when you think about China, your first thought, as a follower of Christ, is nothing political but is a heart for the gospel and a heart for the people of China that they would know the Lord. As you watch the news and as you see world events, we know that we have a dual citizenship. We are citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven first, citizens of the United States second. When I watch stuff unfolding in the world today, I pray that my heart would be that of God's. That you would see all this through the eyes of God. That you would see his love for the whole world. By the way, this love for the nations of the earth, it starts in Genesis and goes all the way through Revelation.

I want to talk for a moment to my young friends because there is something happening in the church, not just our church, but big C church. It's online quite a bit and I've seen pastors lately... It's a little weird to me that on 4th of July when they post a picture of them celebrating the 4th of July, they have to make this big statement that they are not a nationalist, and they are not an idolator. I want to help young people for just a second who are right now pushing away from patriotism just a little bit. You can cheer for your country, pledge allegiance to the flag, and sing the National Anthem. That does not make you a nationalist or an idolator. I do all of this. I'm a patriotic guy. I love my nation. And I love you Woodland Hills, and I hope that's not the only time you clap today. I hope our hearts grow with what Christ is calling us to, going to the nations.

I went to Rotary Club a couple of weeks ago to speak, and we pledged allegiance. That doesn't make me a nationalist or an idolator. I've been cheering for our country. My favorite past time in the Olympics is to sit in my recliner, eat a bowl of cereal while being overly critical of Olympic athletes. You've done it. You're snacking. You're 15-20 pounds overweight going, "Come on, stick that landing!" Anyway...

You can love your nation, and please hear this, Branson, Missouri and Woodland Hills Family Church. Love your nation but have a heart for all the nations of the earth. Go ahead, lead out on it. And do you know who is leading out on that applause today? We just need to be honest and have this conversation. It's young people. We want to be united in this church family. And you, your heart was there. You love your nation, and you want a heart for the nations of the earth. We can be patriotic. We're not nationalists, we're not idolators.

2. The Great Commission calls us to take the gospel to all nations. And not to just have a heart for all the nations, but to take the gospel to all the nations of the earth. Our prayer in this series is that God is

going to call some of you to sell everything and leave this nation. You as a single, you married, you with your family, you would sell everything, leave this nation, move to another nation and give your life to that nation for the sake of the gospel.

I have friends who plan on dying in another nation for the sake of the gospel. They are not just going every now and then, doing a little bit here and there; it's like, "This is the nation I love, this is the nation I'm giving my life to." They are citizens of the United States, but do you know why they are able to say that? It's because God has called them there. It's a word we don't hear a bunch in church anymore – calling. It's an important word.

I'm working with pastors right now who are leaving churches after the pandemic. They are just done. I was with a friend last week. I asked if we was going to take another church and he said, "No, I just think I'm done." If you were called in February of 2020, I bet you're still called today. We've always been taught you don't have to show up to every fight you're invited to but in 2020, we were pretty much expected to show up to every fight we were invited to. What you said got you in trouble, what you didn't say got you in trouble. I told my buddy this was a terrible time to quit. Are you called my God to do what you are doing? We believe in this series when we take the Great Commission seriously, there are going to be many of you called to go and to go to another nation with the gospel. And you have a church family that wants to send you, that wants to help you go, financially, through prayer. Go and we will support that.

I want to talk to my young friends again for just a second. Barna research recently released this. Forty-seven percent of practicing Christian millennials agree, at least somewhat, that it is wrong to share one's personal beliefs with someone of a different faith in hopes that they will one day share the same faith. But when we talk about taking the gospel to the ends of the earth, we're talking about you showing up in a foreign land and declaring that Jesus is the only way to the Father. He is the way, the truth, and the life. And we are boldly declaring that. You will get called names. Jesus said, "If the world hates you, remember they hated me first." This is not a challenge for us. This is an exhortation to us that you are going to go and proclaim, and we need missionaries who are going who stand strong on the scripture, who boldly proclaim the gospel no matter what happens.

I know many of you grew up in church where the slide shows came in on Wednesday night from missionaries that gave their lives to a foreign field. Many of you could, as they were speaking, going "We live under the threat of death. We're not guaranteed our lives." But what did Jesus say? If you want to gain your life, you must lose it for the sake of the gospel. The Great Commission compels us. It doesn't just challenge us to have a heart for the world, but it compels us to go to all the nations of the earth.

3. The Great Commission keeps us from despair and fear. If you are reading Revelation right now and scared, I want to just encourage you as your pastor. You're reading it wrong. It shouldn't lead you to despair and fear. You've heard the old cliché in church, "You've read the back of the book; you know how it ends."

Comedian Mark Lowry, who sang with the Gaither Vocal Band, I heard him this week and he kind of cracked me up.

He said, "I grew up in an independent, fundamental, pre-millennial, King James only Baptist church, where we believed in a pre-tribulation rapture. Before you get to the seals, trumpets, and bowls, the church is gone. Our pastor died at the third point of his sermon. He had a stroke in the middle of a sermon."

That's kind of how I want to go, so I can blame you for the angst and the anxiety and the blockage... Anyway.

Mark goes, "So, we got a brand-new kid out of cemetery who came and spoke and became our pastor. He started preaching that we go through the tribulation. My mom and dad got so mad they left. They walked across the street to a church where we would be raptured out. As a kid, I just kept thinking to myself, *Those poor people over there, they gotta go through the tribulation, that's terrible. To avoid the tribulation, all they have to do is walk across the street.*"

Some of you right now, despair and fear... There is so much political stuff I could share now, but... Somebody said the other day, "You talk too much politically." And I'm like, "Really!? It's been nice having you."

Do you remember Ross Perot? Ross Perot, I was thinking about him this week. We all knew he wasn't going to win and become president, but he was so much fun in the debates, right? Remember he loved his little charts and he'd be like, "This is America. This is hell. This is a handbasket. What am I trying to say here? America is going to hell in a handbasket." That's the second applause? This is horrible. And you right there are my favorite member right now, whatever is going on. I want you to lead out...

I meet some of you that it's where you're at. The Great Commission, the call of Jesus on our lives says that we have a plan for a lost and dying world. And it's not despair and fear; it's hope. This is why Jesus said in John 14, ***"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. 2 My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. 4 You know the way to the place where I am going."***

This is why in 1 Thessalonians 4, when we read about the Second Coming of Christ and Paul is encouraging the church, "Don't be ignorant about those who fall asleep, don't be ignorant about those who die because we believe Jesus died and rose again and we believe he will come back for those of us who are still left and remain." What does he say at the end of that text? It's not to be fearful of death, be on edge, and live in despair over the Second Coming. No, he said, "Encourage one another with these words."

If you are reading Revelation... I told a good friend this week, "You need to read Revelation through the pastoral tone of 1 Thessalonians. We shouldn't be online stirring one another up, and frustrating each other, and living despair and fear with the days that we're living in. We, followers of Jesus, should be

encouraging one another. And the Great Commission does that. We can't lose sight of the mission that we have been given, not the suggestion, but if you're going to call yourself a follower of Jesus, go and make disciples of all nations. Now, I hope you are encouraged thus far in the message.

4. The Great Commission is not a felt need message. Some of you right now are struggling with a lot of personal issues and a felt need message is when you... A marriage message is a felt need message. A finance message is a felt need message. A message on anxiety is a felt need message. Some of you are thinking this idea of going to a place that is unfamiliar, uncomfortable, even dangerous isn't helping your anxiety right now. But when you submit to the lordship of Jesus Christ and you live out this Great Commission, watch what happens in your life. When you are on mission... We say it all the time. The people that are so consumed with themselves... Do you know what one of the best antidotes to selfishness is? Serve. Get outside of yourself. This is our mission statement as a church – Inspiring the family to become fully devoted follower of Christ. The Great Commission is in the *fully devoted* piece, that you would be a Great Commission Christian.

5. The Great Commission reminds us that there is a big world outside of this town. This is the one I've been thinking a lot about while watching the Olympics. I have pastored here for 20 years, and you know it – from fishing to just everything Ozarks and my passion for country music – I am where God has called me to be. I'm 100% where God has called me to be. I love this town. But some of you have moved to this town to get away from scary states, from scary places. I just want to ask during this series, what if God calls someone from our church to California? Look at what happened there. Guess what? Rene Schlaepfer was here in June. And he said it, "We need people taking the gospel to California."

I was just in New York. I'm shocked at the number of you... We go on vacation there. We love New York. We love the diversity, we love the food, we love everything about it. I hear from so many of you, "I would never want to go there." What if God calls you there and I'm going to start praying he does. This is what I love about country music. I was thinking about it this week. We sing it. Hal Ketchum, right? Small town, Saturday night... Sam Hunt, you break up in a small town, right? And the famous friends' song that's out. It's about famous friends in your small town. And Rascal Flatts. I miss Mayberry... Country music is small town. I want us to see there is a big world outside of this small town. And Woodland Hills, in this little town, Branson, Missouri, in the heart of America, God can use this church to take the gospel to the ends of the earth. He can use this church. And He can use you.

A couple of things on context we want with the Great Commission. Go back to Verse 16 of Matthew 28. This is key. **16 Then the eleven disciples...** It's very important to see that the Great Commission was given to a group, not an individual. We have an individual responsibility, but we also have a collective responsibility. Do you know what this means? It means that the Great Commission doesn't mean we need a bunch of lone ranger Christians. Do you know what the Great Commission means? I am supposed to cheer on Mike this morning as he preaches at Bloom. I should be cheering him on. I should be cheering on Jeremy as he preaches at First Baptist. Why? Because collectively, the Great Commission is on all of us. I should be cheering on other believers as they go. This is why when I have friends that go, "I need to make the biggest kingdom impact as possible individually, I'm like, "But when you stand before God, is he going to say, "You shared the gospel with a million people, I had two million..."

Is that what you're going to stand before the Lord with one day? Or that you did your part within taking the gospel to the ends of the earth. This church doesn't support missionaries in every nation. That's the thing I love about watching the Olympics. We learned about nations we didn't even know existed. So, we're not in every nation, but the church, together, working together, we're taking the gospel to the ends of the earth, and we get to be a part of that. **...went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.** This next part is very important. The authority to go. We're not just called to go, we're not just told to go, but Jesus goes with us. We go in the authority of the name of Jesus. **18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."**

I've been to several funerals in the last few years. The graveside service for our veterans gets me every single time. I was trying to process through this week why other than just the sheer sacrifice that they've made for our country, why is it when they take the flag off of the casket and begin folding it, and all the care that is given to that moment. When they walk over... you can hear a pin drop; it's silent. When they walk over to the family member and say, "On behalf of the President of the United State and a grateful nation..." When that is said, to me, it's almost as though the President is there is what that feels like.

We have such a calling that when we go to a place that many of us... The reason I come back to Branson, I minister in a very familiar place. Do you know why? You look like me, you speak my language, you enjoy Cracker Barrel like I do, and we share similar customs. God's going to call some people to familiar places. But God's also going to call people to unfamiliar places and uncomfortable places. Not only that, but he's also going to call people to dangerous places. There will be some missionaries today... As we share with you in a moment and raise the awareness of the missionaries this church supports, there are some missionaries that will not be on the screen because they serve in countries that they can't disclose why they are there. They are in dangerous places.

We read this in Acts 1: 7-8. Bob Dodson, our missionary in Tanzania, we were going back and forth with emails this week. He said, "Often, when people read Acts 1: 7-8," which is where we are going to start in next week's message, "they often think geography with Jesus sending out the disciples. But it's not geography; it's being sent, the Great Commission calling us to go to familiar places, starting in familiar places, then going to uncomfortable places, and going to dangerous places." **7 He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem...** We're going with the authority of Jesus. **"...and in all Judea and Samaria...** places that are similar but different. **"...and to the ends of the earth."** What we're called to.

Getting back to Matthew 28: 19-20, we've talked a lot about having a heart for the nations, but what are we to do when we go to the nations. We're called **to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...** Bringing them into the fellowship of God's family. **20 "...and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."**

We are called to make disciples. What does that mean? Here are five purposes that we want to teach disciples.

Baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They are part of God's family. We lead them to Christ. And we tell them, "Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father except through Jesus. If you will call upon the name of the Lord, you will be saved. If you will confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that he has been raised from the dead, you will be saved and become part of God's family."

A disciple is one who worships, knows, and loves God. So, fellowship, worship, discipleship. We don't just want to go into the nations of the earth and lead people to Christ and leave. A missionary is one who goes, leads people to Christ, and then disciples them, walks alongside them, teaches them what it means to be like Jesus. Teaching them everything he has commanded us.

A disciple is one who serves those inside and outside the church – ministry. One of the things you'll find with missionaries – and I love about Bob and Dee Dodson – they train pastors, they plant churches, but as soon as they possibly can, they put a national pastor in that church as the lead pastor, as the senior pastor to walk alongside to say this is not just about becoming part of God's family and learning and studying; it's about serving and putting your gifts and your passion and your calling to work for the kingdom.

A disciple is one who shares the gospel with the lost. What, as a church, can we do with this Great Commission, as we make disciples of all nations? It starts for us with needing to pray for our missionaries. You think we've had a difficult year? Be a missionary on a foreign field during this season.

I met with one of the missionaries we supported this year who was here. He's a missionary to Kenya. He was here in January, and he was planning on going back in January, but it was positive COVID test after positive COVID test. Kenya, right above Tanzania, these two countries handled the pandemic. Kenya was on strict lockdown. Tanzania was very wide open, so he had to have a negative test to get back. It's not easy to not have a home in the US and just kind of be floating between people. You helped get through that time. It was a difficult season, a challenging season.

One of the things this church does that I love, and we've done it for 20 years, is we care for the families and the marriages of our missionaries. Missions work is very challenging as you can imagine. Some people will go to the field and spend the first year or two just learning the language. And you, through your generosity, have given to allow missionaries to take a one- or two-week vacation just to get away and unwind a little bit s a family.

I was telling a friend this year, I think that's where we are in the next year. I told a buddy of mine to stop reading articles about how to grow your church. I don't think we're at a church growth season as the church. I think we're in a soul care season as a church. Pastors don't need a seminar right now on how to add more numbers. They need a seminar on how to stay in ministry and how not to leave and how to know their calling and how to care for the souls and be reminded of what God has called them to and

what he had called them to still in February of 2020, and not allowing this season that we've been in to get them into drift. They need us to pray for them.

A big part of this series is raising the awareness, letting you know who our missionaries are so you can pray for them. This will all be on our website. Many came to me after the first service wanting to know all of them so they could begin praying for them by name each day. We asked our missionaries to send us these videos, and then Chris edited them. Mackenzi and Katie did a great job putting this together and we want to share it with you so you can be encouraged and know how to pray for those that we have in our nation and to the nations of the earth.

[video plays]

Ted Cunningham: So, I love the practical takeaways from that so continue to pray for our missionaries, but we want to continue to give, and we want to continue to give well. You can hit the "give online now" button to make your gift today. You can give in the box as you leave today, but your generosity... We support two ways primarily. We have missionaries that we've supported with monthly support for almost 20 years. That's one way we support ongoing missions, people that are going.

Remember, missions is a long game. Making disciples is not a one-week project. It is a long game and that's why we're saying for many of you during this series that God would call you to give your life to missions. Another way we give is one-time gifts. There are times needs come to us from missionaries like our friend in Kenya who is trying to get back to Kenya but was stuck in the states for about four or five months. It was an opportunity for you to be generous.

We give to Care for Kids here locally. We give to a lot of local ministries. We give to national ministries. But it doesn't stop there. We want to make sure this church is always positioned and passionate for the gospel to go way beyond our borders.

We need to send missionaries from this church. Travis Brawner is our elder over missions. We talked about it again this morning after the first service. If God is calling you... Maybe this has been something you and your spouse have been working through, you and your family have been talking about for some time, but through the last year, it didn't seem like the right timing. You don't know if you even have the support or the encouragement to go. Our prayer team is going to be down front after the service today, passionate about missions.

I look out and see Don and Cheryl. They spent a decade of their lives encouraging missionaries, encouraging marriages of missionaries. Please come forward. Talk to someone. Let us be a church that sends you. When we say send, we mean significantly. We don't mean we're just going to pray for you. We want to gather around you, help how we can financially, prepare you with whatever mission organization that you will go out with. We want to be that church. I can say in over 20 years, we have sent missionaries out, but being a sending church has not been enough of our focus. I know this is one area where God is stretching us and leading us. So, we can give, we can pray, but we can also go.

I know where I'm called. I know what God has called me to do. What has God called you to do? Do you know that? Have you prayed through that? You're like, *I'm here in Branson, I'm here for a while. I just moved here to get out of a bad state. Why would you tell me to be going back?* I'm not telling you to go back. I'm not telling you to do anything. I'm telling you to listen to the voice of God. And listen for that calling in your life. What is God calling you to do as we go to the ends of the earth as a church.

Father, we are grateful for the work that you are doing from Tanzania to Haiti, to Indonesia and Fiji, to Nicaragua, and Kenya, to all the nations where we have missionaries who are faithfully serving. We pray for them today. We pray for their marriages, we pray for their families, we pray that as they continue to do the work of making disciples and as they come under attack, we ask that you protect them from evil, that you fulfill your purpose in their calling and in their lives. I pray that as they need help and encouragement, this will be a church known for that. When they have needs that are presented, we are able to meet those needs. Continue to comfort them, encourage them, in the midst of their ministry.

And for those who serve nationally in our church, as they travel the country serving and reaching people and making disciples, I pray for this church to continue to be a support network for them and that we would see many people over the next couple of weeks, over the next couple of years, called to go and to give their lives for the gospel in this nation, in this town, and to the ends of the earth.

For the one who has never placed faith in Jesus, that today would be the day they confess with their mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in their heart that he has been raised from the dead that they would be saved, that they would call out to you.

In the authority of the name of Jesus we pray all of this. Amen.