



# Final Marching Orders

## Matthew 28:16-20

1. **March to Galilee (verses 16-17).**
2. **March to the World (verses 18-20).**

Seven and a half years ago, on July 2, 1998, I led a Bible study in Rockford for the very first time. My wife and two children at the time were living in DeKalb. We traveled here to Rockford to gather together with four other families, who were living in Rockford. Our little group was a Flock Bible study from Kishwaukee Bible Church, where each of the families had recently begun to attend. Some of you were there. We started this Bible study with a great desire to see the Lord raise up a church from that small group of people. We were praying that the Lord would give us contacts to speak with others to tell them of what we were praying for the Lord to do. You, who are here today, are the answer to our prayers seven and a half years ago.

On that first Thursday evening when we met, it was my desire to cast a vision for a church that would honor God in all that we would do. When I thought about what text of Scripture would help us to see clearly what our vision should be as a church, my choice was Matthew 28:16-20, the very text that we will look at this morning. When leading that initial Bible study here in Rockford, I chose this text, because, in it, Jesus gave His disciples their final marching orders. He told them what they needed to do now that He was raised from the dead. Jesus wasn't going to remain upon the earth in bodily form forever. (He could have chosen to do so. But He didn't). And now that He was leaving, He left His disciples with His final instructions. He was passing the baton to His disciples. He was telling His disciples, "When all is said and done, this is what you need to focus on." The instructions that Jesus gave to these eleven disciples are still pertinent for us today. I have entitled my message this morning, "Final Marching Orders."

Let's now consider the text.

### Matthew 28:16-20

But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated. And when they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some were doubtful. And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

This text is so well known that it has a name. It is called, "The Great Commission." In this text, Jesus told His disciples to ...

1. **March to Galilee (verses 16-17).**

In verse 16, we see the disciples on the move. The events of Matthew 21-28 have all been centered in Jerusalem during the final week of the life of Christ. In chapter 21, Jesus entered into Jerusalem on a donkey, as a king would enter the city. In chapters 21-23, Jesus spoke His final words to the religious leaders in Jerusalem who were soon to reject him. In chapters 24-25, Jesus told His disciples of the things to come, while sitting upon the Mount of Olives, overlooking Jerusalem, the city He loved. In chapters 26-28, Jesus was betrayed, arrested, and put to death by the religious leaders just outside the city gates. All of this took place in (or around) Jerusalem.

But, now, after the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, the focus turns northward, about 70 miles to the region of Galilee. In chapter 26, verse 32, Jesus had anticipated this change of scenery. He told His disciples, "After I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee." This is the message that the angel told the women (in 28:7), "He is going before you into Galilee, there you will see Him." This is the message that the risen Christ told the women (in 28:10), "Go and take word to My brethren to leave for Galilee, and there they shall see Me."

After being told three times, "the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated" (as verse 16 tells us). Apparently, Jesus had "designated" a mountain where they would meet once He rose from the dead. I would suspect that this mountain was a common meeting place of the disciples, away from the crowds, where Jesus could be with them personally. Remember that the ministry of Jesus was centered in Galilee. In Galilee was where He did almost all of His preaching and teaching and healing and ministering and discipling. There were three towns in particular where His ministry was focused, Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum (Matt. 11:21-24). Each of these town were on the north-western side of the Sea of Galilee.

It was in this region that Jesus "designated" a location of their future meeting. I believe that this location was much like the garden of Gethsemane. Judas knew where Jesus would be on the evening of the Passover, because "Jesus had often met there with His disciples" (John 18:2). I believe that these disciples had no problem finding Jesus in Galilee. They simply returned to the location where Jesus had often met with His disciples. If you travel today to the Sea of Galilee, you will find a large mountain on the north-western side of the sea, called Mount Arbel. Perhaps this is where His disciples met with him.

Verse 17 records the moment when these disciples first arrived to see Him in the flesh. When they saw Him, "They worshiped Him." Their reaction was much like the reaction of the women who first encountered Jesus near His empty tomb. We read in verse 9 that when "they

came up and took hold of His feet and worshiped Him." We have no indication at all that Jesus refused their worship.

When Peter came to Caesarea, Cornelius "fell at his feet and worshiped him" (Acts 10:25). "But Peter raised him up, saying, 'Stand up, I too am just a man'" (Acts 10:26). Peter clearly understood the difference between being divine and being human. It was improper for others to worship him, being another man. Jesus also understood the difference between being divine and being human. He received their worship. The angels also understand this difference between the divine and the human. On two occasions, the apostle John had fallen down at the feet of an angel in heaven who told him of the wonders that would take place. On both instances, the angel responded, "Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours" (Rev. 19:10; 22:9). But, here, we see the disciples, prostrated and worshiping Jesus. And Jesus received His worship. In so doing, Jesus gave further support of His claim to be God.

I suspect that the disciples responded this way because for the first time, they fully came to understand that Jesus was indeed the Lord God of the universe! Oh, they had reasons to see so before. They had seen the lame walk and the blind see and winds calmed. They had seen Jesus feed the multitudes from only a few fish and a few, small loaves of bread. But, Jesus standing before them alive was the greatest of all miracles that they had seen! Jesus, who had been brutally murdered, had now come back to life! He was standing before them, alive and well! They knew that death could not contain Him. And they understood, that Jesus was worthy of their worship. He is worthy of our worship as well!

But, even in their worship, there was some doubt in the minds of some of the disciples. Why they doubted, I'm not sure. It may have been because they weren't quite entirely convinced that the one standing before them was Jesus. They may have thought that they were seeing a vision and not reality, knowing that they were tired, and open to illusions. I believe that they doubted, because they had a difficult time grasping what had really taken place with all of the implications of what it meant.

A few weeks ago, I told you the story of the time in which I surprised my parents by driving cross country with a friend of mine. I have another story to report to you today. It happened this week. My wife's sister was due to have a baby this past week. In the past few weeks, her sister (Janelle) has been calling my wife (Yvonne) with loads of questions about baby things. Yvonne told me that she would really like to spend some time out in California, helping her sister with their first child. She thought that it would be nice to surprise her and come out to California unannounced. And she really wanted to see Janelle in the hospital with the baby.

We found out that they were going to begin inducing labor on Monday morning. And so, Yvonne left our house on Monday afternoon to travel out to California to play a surprise visit to her sister. We tried very hard to keep it a surprise. When Yvonne was in the air, flying to California, we weren't going to answer the phone, lest we receive a call from California telling us of the new birth without being able to contact Yvonne (as she was in the air). So, that Monday afternoon, we didn't answer the phone at all. Just after Yvonne landed, she called me to see if I had heard any news yet. I told her that I hadn't. Not ten minutes later, I received a call from Janelle, who told me that she had delivered a healthy baby boy, Justin Todd is his name. While on the phone, I told Janelle, "I would put Yvonne on the phone. But, she's out and she hasn't come home yet. I'll call her cell phone and tell her to call you." Immediately, I called Yvonne, who was on her way home from the airport. She called Janelle to catch up on how everything went. She found out that both mother and baby were doing well. She said, "Oh, how I wish I could be there and see the baby." (With a big smile on her face, I'm sure).

So, on her way home from the airport, she stopped at the hospital to see Janelle and the baby, within an hour or two of being born. Needless to say, her sister was shocked when she saw Yvonne. They got her reaction on video and sent it to me this past week. To get the effect of the shock, you really need to watch the video. Janelle's facial expression told it all! She was very confused and blown away with her sister showing up from across the country. I watched the video several times and was able to transcribe Janelle's first words when she saw her sister. The video was about a minute long. This is what she said, ... "Uh. ... What are you doing here? ... Oh my gosh. ... What are you doing here? ... Wow. ... Oh wow. ... Oh my gosh. ... Wow. ... Wow. ... Oh my goodness. ... It's like ... It's like wait! ... Wow. ... Thank you. ... How nice of Steve to let you go! ... Oh my gosh. ... How long are you here for?" At that point, the video clip stopped, so I don't know how many more "wow's" she said.

I wouldn't be surprised if quote a few more came out of her mouth. I tell you that story because there was a period of time that she was in utter disbelief. It just didn't compute for her. Less than an hour ago, she had spoken with my wife, assuming her to be in Illinois. And then, ... she shows up!

I believe that this is similar to what took place when the disciples first saw Jesus risen from the dead in Galilee (verse 17). The last that they had seen of Him was when the Romans were taking Him away to be crucified. And here He was, standing before them in complete health! For some of the disciples, it just didn't compute. And thus, they doubted.

As I pondered this text this week, the thought came to my mind, "Why did Matthew include this little phrase for us?" This is the climax of the book! This is where it is all headed! Of anything that Matthew wanted to convince his readers of was the reality of the resurrection. He didn't want to put something in the text that it going to lessen the impact. However, I think that it is here to encourage us. Here were people who were looking upon the risen Christ, and yet, there were still doubts in the minds of some of them.

One of the things that really impacted me from my message last week, in which I spoke about those who deny the resurrection, is that the only logical explanation for the facts surrounding the life of Jesus is that He really did rise from the dead in His body! After years of trying to come up with some type of reasonable explanation for the data, there has been no other satisfactory explanation. Jesus did rise from the dead. And yet, it's difficult to believe. It's difficult to believe that someone has risen from the dead, especially someone who has been so cruelly beaten! In fact, do you know how difficult it is to believe this? It's impossible, apart from the Lord opening our eyes to believe. Jesus told us "with men [salvation] is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26). And that's why I closed last week's sermon looking at Luke 16, where Jesus said, "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead" (Luke 16:31). God grants the faith to believe what is written about Him.

And so, church family, be comforted in your doubts and difficulty to believe. Some of the disciples had doubts as well. But, don't rest to think

that it is fine to stay in your doubts. When some of the disciples were here found doubting, I don't believe that they were doubts of unbelief! I believe that they were doubts of Janelle, whose sister had flown across the country to be with her and her newborn. "Can it really be? It is really true? I can't believe it!?! Wow! Wow! Wow!" Regarding the resurrection, such out to be our doubts! They ought to be doubts of amazement, seeking to believe. We ought to be in awe of the greatness of the news, as we attempt and try to fully grasp it!

These disciples (1) marched to Galilee (verses 16-17). Once they arrived, Jesus gave them orders to ...  
2. March to the World (verses 18-20).

His instructions to them are three-fold: He first speaks of (1) His Authority (verse 18). And then, Jesus speaks of (2) Our Actions (verses 19-20a). Finally, Jesus gives them (3) His Assurance (verse 20b). Let's look first at ...

### **1. His Authority (verse 18).**

In verse 18, Jesus said, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth." When Jesus walked the earth, He had much authority. He had authority over disease, cleansing the leper and raising paralytics and casting away fevers (Matt. 8:1-17). He had authority over nature, calming the storm with a word (Matt. 8:23-27). He had authority over the demonic realm, casting out a legion of demons from two men (Matt. 8:28-34). He had authority over sin, forgiving the paralytic of His sins (Matt. 9:1-8).

But, it was through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, that God the Father gave Him **all** authority. Jesus rules the universe. It was the resurrection that declared Jesus to be "the Son of God with power" (Rom. 1:4; Acts 13:33). It was the resurrection that has given Jesus the authority to be the final judge of the whole world (Acts 17:31). It was the resurrection that lifted Jesus up to sit at the right hand of His heavenly Father (Psalm 110).

When you look out upon our little rebellious planet, it doesn't look much like He does. When you read the news and hear of the murders and crimes and liars and cheats, it doesn't much look like Jesus has all authority. But, be assured, He has all authority. He sits on the throne of heaven. For the time being, He is there, waiting. He is waiting until His enemies be subjected under His feet! (Ps. 110:1).

Though Jesus has all authority, He doesn't yet exert all of His authority. He has it, but He isn't fully exerting it. But, there will be a day when the kingdoms are given to Him and all the world will see Jesus coming in the splendor of His power. In Daniel 7, we have prophecy of the coming, fully realized power and dominion that will be given to the Messiah! "I kept looking in the night visions. And behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming. And He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and men of every language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; And His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed" (Dan. 7:13-14). This is the glorious Lord that we serve!

It is precisely because Jesus is so high and almighty and lifted up, that we have a job to do. This is evident because verse 19 begins with at "therefore." It is His authority (verse 18) that leads to ...

### **2. Our Actions (verses 19-20a).**

Jesus said (in verses 19-20), "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you." In light of the glorious Lord that we serve in heaven, it is our task to "make disciples" here on earth. In fact, this is the main verb in this sentence: "make disciples." Or, you might say it with one word as the Greek does, we need to "disciplize" people.

When we hear the word, "disciple," we often associate it with the "twelve disciples." But a "disciple" is the word that the Bible most often uses to describe a Christian. When the ministry of Jesus began, we are told in John 4:1 that Jesus "was making and baptizing more disciples than John." The blind man who received his sight was called a "disciple" (John 9:28). Joseph of Arimathea was called a "disciple" of Christ (John 19:38). Tabitha was called a "disciple" (Acts 9:36). In the book of Acts, when describing the church, it often used the word, "disciples" to describe Christ-followers. In Acts 6:1, we read of the "disciples" increasing in number. In Acts 6:7, we read, "the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem." When Saul sought to persecute the Christians, he was "breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord" (Acts 9:1). The term "Christian" first began to be used in Antioch (Acts 11:26), some 5-10 years after the death of Christ.

I say all of that simply to make the point: when Jesus says, "make disciples," He was simply telling His own disciples to multiply themselves. They were followers of Christ. They were to encourage others to follow Christ as well. We need to see people come to faith. We need to see people continue in the faith. Question: "What is Rock Valley Bible Church" all about? Answer: "Making disciples."

When we conducted that first Bible study here in Rockford, one of the things that I told those in attendance was that any future church that God raised up needs. A future church needs to be a body of disciples who do the work of making disciples. What is the vision statement of Rock Valley Bible Church? We are to be and to do. We are to be a body of disciples, who do the work of making disciples.

Jesus told His disciples **how** to do this. In this passage, the main idea is that we need to "make disciples." This is the main verb. But, there are three other ideas that instruct us how. Each of these ideas are written by Matthew as participles, which modify the main verb. We need to be "going." We need to be "baptizing." We need to be "teaching." These actions are crucial to the disciple-making process. We need to find them, convert them, and teach them! We shall look at each of them in sequence.

### **GO!**

Perhaps you remember when Jesus initially called His disciples. They were casting their nets into the sea, seeking to catch fish (Matt. 4:18).

Jesus called out to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matt. 4:19). In His final words, Jesus returns to this theme. "Men, you have been with me for three years now. I have been teaching you how to fish for men. And now, go out and do it! Go out and make disciples." Praise the Lord, they were obedient to the call of Christ!

Rock Valley Bible Church exists today, in part, because the disciples went out from Jerusalem to spread the message of the good news of the gospel of Christ. They went, and then someone else went, and then someone else went, and then someone else went. Ultimately, the message has come to Rockford, Illinois. The gospel of Jesus Christ has traveled halfway around the world!

But, you need to realize that the disciples didn't go out instantly. It's not like they took off from Galilee to the remote parts of the earth. First, they returned to Jerusalem and focused their attention upon that city. They spent their time making disciples in Jerusalem. They were preaching in the temple and thousands were being saved. They were preaching in the synagogues. They were preaching in the houses of people. Acts 5:42 describes their work very well, "Every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ." They were a body of disciples, doing the work of making disciples. Only once they were doing the work in Jerusalem did they go out.

Do you have any idea how long they remained in Jerusalem? More than three years they were in Jerusalem, cultivating the church and dealing with the difficulties of church growth (Acts 6:1). But, with the stoning of Stephen, the church was forced out of the city, because it was no longer safe to be a Christian in the city of Jerusalem. This event was called the "diaspora," which is simply a Greek word that means, "dispersion" or "scattering."

Do you know who left Jerusalem? It wasn't the apostles. It was the people. In Acts 8:1, we read, "On that day a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles." The church scattered to find safe regions in which to live. This brought the gospel into other regions of the nation of Israel.

When the people scattered, they relocated in other cities in Israel, getting jobs and supporting their families. But, having been so impacted by what they had experienced in Jerusalem, they told others of Christ! As a result of their testimony, people were believing and churches were forming. But, much of this spreading of the apostles. It was the people, spread out to speak about Christ!

That's not to say that the apostles never left Jerusalem, because eventually, according to tradition, many of them died a martyr's death in foreign lands. But, when it was too dangerous to live in Jerusalem, the apostles stayed for a time to focus upon the developing church. Once the church was fairly established, these apostles went to the uttermost parts of the earth.

Peter went first to Samaria, where many had come to faith (Acts 8:14). Later, Peter spread the gospel to the gentiles in Caesarea (As recorded for us in Acts 10). In the first few verses of Acts 13, we read how the church had spread north to Antioch. From there, Paul and Barnabas were sent out to Pamphylia, which is modern day Turkey. Later, Paul continued on to Macedonia and Achaia, which is modern day Greece.

Likewise, the other apostles went out as well. Tradition says that Andrew went to Achaia, where he was martyred. Thomas went to India, where he was martyred. Bartholomew went to Phrygia, Hieropolis, and Armenia, ultimately being martyred in India. Matthew, the writer of our gospel, went to Egypt, where he was martyred with a spear.

Christianity is missionary in spirit. Those who have come to faith in Christ have a message that they want to get out to the world! But the message that needs to get out of the world must start at home. This is what the initial disciples did. They focused their initial attention at home, because there was much work to be done there! As the Lord spread the work, those who heard the gospel of Christ responded.

## **BAPTIZE!**

The word was the second action: the act of baptizing. Before they went out to the nations of the world, they were first busy "baptizing in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" right there in Jerusalem. When you read the book of Acts, you read of countless numbers of people coming to faith in Christ and then being baptized!

On the day of Pentecost, when Peter preached the resurrection of Christ, many were "pierced to the heart" and said to Peter, "What shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). Their eyes were opened for the first time that they had crucified the "Lord of glory" (1 Cor. 2:8). Peter told them, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins" (Acts 2:38). Those who believed were baptized: 3,000 souls. When Philip was in Samaria, "preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ," the people were believing and being baptized (Acts 8:12-13). When Philip preached Jesus to the Ethiopian eunuch, he came to faith and wanted to be baptized. And so, Philip baptized him right there along side the road (Acts 8:26-40). When the Lord Jesus met Saul along the road to Damascus, he was blinded. A man named Ananias came and laid hands upon him. When he regained his sight, "he arose and was baptized" (Acts 9:18). When Peter went to Caesarea to preach the good news of Christ, the people believed and were baptized (Acts 10:48). When Paul went to Thyatira, a certain woman, named Lydia, believed the gospel (Acts 16:14). She was then baptized, along with her family (Acts 16:15). When the Philippian jailer believed in Christ, he was soon baptized, along with his entire believing household (Acts 16:34). When Paul traveled to Corinth, many "were believing and being baptized" (Acts 18:8). In Ephesus, the believers in Christ were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 19:5). This was the pattern of the early church. **When people believed, they were baptized.** When people were converted to Christ, they were baptized.

I believe that this concept here is crucial to understanding what Jesus meant when he told His disciples to go and to baptize. He means, to go and convert people "from idols to serve a living and true God" (1 Thess. 1:9). As a sign of their conversion, they were to be immersed in water.

Have you done this? Have you followed in obedience to the Lord through the waters of baptism? If you have been converted to Christ, He

tells you to be baptized.

These are the marching orders that Jesus gave to His disciples: Go and speak with people. See them converted and baptize them. And don't just leave them alone. Jesus says to teach them as well. This leads to the third word, ...

## **TEACH!**

Jesus said, "Teach them to observe all that I commanded you" (verse 20). Such activity consumes a major effort of the church. It's no wonder that the apostles would often go and spend long periods of time in one place. When there were converts, they needed to be taught and trained in the grace of God through Christ. In Antioch, we are told that he "spent a long time with the disciples" (Acts 14:28). When Paul initially arrived in Corinth, "he settled there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them" (Acts 18:11). He was in Ephesus for three years (Acts 20:31). When Paul couldn't get to cities he had been, like Thessalonica or Colossae or Ephesus, he constantly sent letters to teach and instruct the believers there.

Teaching and learning are crucial to the Christian life. Jesus said, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me" (Matt. 22:28-29). Be a student. Be a follower.

Please notice the words of Jesus how applicational they are. When the disciples were to go out, they were to teach others to obey! This isn't an exercise of the mind here. It is an exercise of obedience. Paul wrote that His apostleship that he received was for the purpose "to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles" (Romans 1:5).

This is what we ought to be about at Rock Valley Bible Church. We need to be a church that goes and baptizes and teaches.

At this point in my message, I wish that I could tell you of the hundreds of converts that we have had come to Rock Valley Bible Church. But, such is not the case. Sadly, our church has not grown through new converts. For the most part, we have grown from people who have either moved into the area, or become disappointed in their previous church. That is a fact of life. Oh, there have been a few new believers come into our midst. For this, I am grateful. There have also been a few others who have begun to attend, who haven't been attending church in recent years, and feel the need to come back. For this, too, I am grateful.

What we have observed here at our church is no different than what many churches have experienced across our land. Most of the churches across America that are experiencing phenomenal growth are growing because of people coming from other churches, looking for something new or refreshing or different.

But, do you know why people come to Rock Valley Bible Church? One of the reasons has to do with that last part of the great commission. I believe that we are doing well at teaching the whole counsel of God. I believe that we are doing well at encouraging the believers to follow Christ with their whole heart. Those who come and stay at Rock Valley Bible Church are those who really want to grow in their walk with Christ. We are dead earnest about teaching people to obey Jesus. As I look out among you all, I am encouraged with your depth of love to Jesus. We aren't a church of shallow, superficial followers of Christ. We have families that are sold out to Christ. In this, we are doing well. As your pastor, I commend you in these things.

Then, why haven't we seen baptisms? Why haven't we seen conversions? Perhaps it's because we haven't gone. I'm not talking about going to far distant lands (which we are committed to do). But, not all of us will have the opportunity to go so far away. I'm talking about each of you going out of your own house to speak with others. I'm talking about going to your neighbor. I'm talking about going to community events, where you might just have a chance to meet some people and speak with them.

Do you realize that Rockford is the location that others might well say, "We need to go there!" But realize this: you are in the mission field. You are in the nations to which others only had a dream about and were praying about.

Do your neighbors even know that you are a Christian? I know that it is hard, especially when your neighbor drives up to his house, clicks on the garage door opener, drives in, and closes the door, before you ever have a chance to say hello. But, when they drive up, are you waving to them, seeking to speak with them? When your neighbor is out raking the leaves, are you thinking about going to speak with them?

I have been challenged by the example of one of our neighbors. They are dear Christian friends. The man of this household makes great efforts to go out and speak with his neighbors. It's not unusual to drive by his house in the neighborhood only to see him talking with some neighbor in an effort to reach out to them and love them and share the gospel with them. I remember when we moved into our neighborhood, several neighbors told me another pastor who lived down the street. For a while, I didn't quite know who they were talking about. And then, it dawned on me that they were talking about my neighbor, who had spoken to them of Christ. However, he isn't a pastor. He is a layman committed to sharing his faith. He is a great challenge for me.

What sort of efforts are you making to speak with others of the gospel of Christ? When was the last time that you sought to get out of your house and attend something where you would have an opportunity to talk with people? Are there even unsaved people in your life? Have you tried to create evangelistic opportunities?

There have been various things that I have tried. Some with success and some without success. I share them with you, not because I have been so good at evangelistic efforts, but because I have sought to try. In recent years, I've coached soccer and played on a soccer team with the goal of sharing the gospel with fellow team mates or parents. Opportunities have come in both instances. This past year, there was one family going through a difficult time with their children. I was able to help counsel him a bit. I gave him a Christian book on parenting, which he was very glad to receive.

This past Halloween, I tried to be a bit more aggressive in meeting people. I rolled our charcoal grill out to the side of the street and started a

fire in it. We had some popcorn and hot apple cider for the adults, as the children went to receive their candy and tracts at the door. A few people stayed for a few minutes to chat. One man, who was drinking his beer, said, "Now, that's different what you are doing." I told him that I was simply seeking to meet my neighbors. He lives just down the street. In another conversation, I had an opportunity to speak about being a pastor and how our church meets and Rockford Christian High School and how the Lord has blessed our congregation. In another conversation, I had a chance to talk a bit about home schooling with a family, who is sort-of thinking about doing it in a few years. I invited them to come by anytime and we would be glad to talk about it with them.

Perhaps our best evangelistic opportunity has come each year at Thanksgiving time, when we have hosted some foreign students from the Chicagoland area. They have come into our home on Wednesday evening, and left after church on Sunday morning. Without fail, they have heard the gospel and have seen it worked out in our home. Some have been very eager. Some haven't been very eager at all. Last year, when we met our two students on Wednesday evening before Thanksgiving, we began to have a little discussion. These men were from China. When they found out that I was a pastor, their eyes got real big and they said, "Then, you can teach us the Bible!" We had daily Bible studies in our home as they were very interested in learning the truth.

I share these things, not because I've been so successful in my personal evangelism. I share these things to try to provoke you to think about ways in which you can "go" and speak with others. So, I encourage you to pray about how you can get out to speak with other people. Perhaps the things that we have done as a family are difficult for you. Perhaps you don't know much about athletics or live in the countryside, where Halloween visitors are few and far between. But, there are other things that I'm sure that you can do, that I cannot. So think and pray about ways to be involved. I have a missionary friend in Germany who says, "Evangelism is 90% prayer." Are you praying for opportunities?

But, there may be another reason why we have seen so few conversions: It is the Lord who converts people. Over the years, I have spoken to many unsaved people about spiritual things. The vast majority of them aren't really very interested at all. But, it is our responsibility to cast the seed into the soil and hope that it falls upon good soil. In recent days, I have begun to meet with somebody who is incredibly hungry for spiritual things. What a refreshing change it has been from the many that I have spoken with who are so cold. But, what has impressed me is this: It's not like I'm doing anything greatly different with this person. He has simply fallen into my lap as one who is hungry. It is the work of the Lord that has done this. My earnest prayer is for this man to embrace Christ and come and be involved in our church!

If we want to be used of the Lord, we need to be faithful in walking through the doors that He provides for us. This is what Christ is calling us to do. How often is it easy to forget our purpose in this life. I remember hearing the parable of the life-saving station that forgot its purpose.

On a dangerous sea coast where shipwrecks often occur there was once a crude little life-saving station. The building was just a hut, and there was only one boat but the few devoted members kept a constant watch over the sea, and with no thought for themselves went out day and night tirelessly searching for the lost. Some of those who were saved and various others in the surrounding area wanted to become associated with the station and give of their time and money and effort for the support of its work. New boats were bought and new crews trained. The little life saving station grew. Some of the members of the life-saving station were unhappy that the building was so crude and poorly equipped. They felt that a more comfortable place should be provided as the first refuge of those saved from the sea. They replaced the emergency cots with beds and put better furniture in the enlarged building.

Now the life-saving station became a popular gathering place for its members, and they decorated it beautifully and furnished it exquisitely, because they used it as a sort of club. Fewer members were now interested in going to sea on life-saving missions, so they hired life-boat crews to do this work. The life-saving motif still prevailed in this club's decoration, and there was a liturgical life-boat in the room where the club initiations were held.

About this time a large ship was wrecked off the coast, and the hired crews brought in boat loads of cold, wet and half-drowned people. They were dirty and sick and they messed up the beautiful new clubhouse. The property committee soon met and had a shower house built outside the club where victims of shipwreck could be cleaned up before coming inside. At the next meeting, there was a split in the club membership. Most of the members wanted to stop the club's life-saving activities as being unpleasant and a hindrance to the normal social life of the club. Some members, however, insisted upon life-saving as their primary purpose and pointed out that they were still called a life-saving station. But these were finally voted down and told that if they wanted to save the lives of all the various kinds of people who were shipwrecked in those waters, they could begin their own life saving station down the coast. They did.

As the years went by, the new station experienced the same changes that had occurred in the old. It evolved into a club, and yet, another life-saving station was founded. History continued to repeat itself, and if you visit that sea coast today, you will find a number of exclusive clubs along that shore. Shipwrecks are frequent in those waters, but most of the people drown!" [U](#)

How easy is it for us to drift into wanting church to be a nice, comfortable place where we can enjoy one another and live happily ever after. Please remember that the church has its purpose and function and role. I will be spending the next few weeks talking about the church and challenging you to examine your role within this church to see if it is everything that God wants it to be. It's important that we focus upon worshiping the Lord our God and loving one another. It's important that we are taught and trained how to love Christ and how to serve one another. But, we must not forget that the church is not just about us! It's about the world of lost people, who don't know Christ and are headed for a Christless eternity, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. The purpose in all that we do is to create a community of believers that will be strengthened in their faith to speak it forth to a lost world, who is dying in it sin! My agenda as a pastor, is to stimulate your hearts with the truth about Christ, that you would go from this place into your sphere of influence talking about the gospel of Christ.

The great assurance that we have is that we won't be unsuccessful.

### **3. His Assurance (verse 20b).**

Jesus said, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Jesus knows how difficult the task is. Jesus knows how impossible the task is. Without His aid and without His help, we would all flounder and fail. He has promised never to leave us nor forsake us (Heb. 13:5). The Jesus who walked with the disciples is with us! Let us walk boldly in that assurance.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on November 13, 2005 by Steve Brandon.  
For more information see [www.rvbc.cc](http://www.rvbc.cc).

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[1] The author of this insightful story is unknown to me. This illustration is all over the internet, which a Google search will easily reveal.