

Ready... Steady... Go!

Roger Frapwell, Charlane Bradley, Laura King,

25th April 2021

Sermon Audio file

Ready, Steady, GO!

The Great Commission

Matthew 28:16-20, Luke 24:44-48, Acts 1:8

Intro – 8 years ago the Church had a football team. I was Player / Manager. We entered the bottom Division of the local Saturday league and in our first season let's just say that our results were very consistent!! We would practise in training, select a team, decide upon a team formation, go through a game plan on match day, get the players properly warmed up before the game, then it'd be the real thing... We'd have to get out there and do it. Put the theory into practise. Same message each week. At half time there'd be injuries and bruises, a few good things to be encouraged, but many more things needing to be addressed, usually in defence, then after some sliced oranges it's out there for the 2nd half!

"Come on guys! We can do this! Believe!" Is that similar to how we feel or operate regarding sharing our faith and being effective witnesses? We know how we ought to be and we try to put the theory into practise but, after lots of huff and puff, all we've got to show for it are a few knocks and a sense of feeling disheartened – yet again. Maybe it's half time? Here is our 'sliced oranges' when we come together and re-group before we go back out for the 2nd half!

Paul said, "My life is worth nothing unless I use it for doing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus – the work of telling others the Good News about God's wonderful kindness and love" (Acts 20: 24 NLT)

He makes it sound so easy! We shudder with how hard it is when, in the main, people don't want to know...

"Thank you, O my Father, for giving us your Son, and for leaving your Spirit until the work on earth is done."

Whatever the debates within the Church over the Person, work and gifts of the Holy Spirit, one of His primary roles is to help us to reach people for Jesus, so that Mission 'Impossible' becomes Mission 'Possible'

Message 1 - We all have a role to play - Our theme today is "Ready, Steady, GO!" We need to be ready, we need to get ourselves set, but then there is a time to go. None of us can ignore what Jesus said to his followers post Easter, "GO into ALL the world..." (Matt 28). The message / our message will include "repentance and forgiveness" (Luke 24). But ALL of us will be his witnesses. "YOU will be my witnesses" (Acts 1: 8), Jesus said to all of his followers. What he didn't say was 'how'. That's important to grasp hold of otherwise we can put 2 + 2 together and make 5. We hear the dreaded 'E' word = Evangelism and we think of street corner preachers and often conclude, "That's not me, so evangelism isn't for me!" Jesus didn't tell everyone to stand on a street corner. What he did say was that we should seek to be a

witness for him, so our task is to consider 'how'. There are various ways people did that in the New Testament so we'll look at some examples and see if, maybe, we can see something relevant in one or maybe more or those.

"Woe to me if I don't preach the Gospel" (1 Cor 9: 16) was Paul's feeling about his own calling. But he had a very specific role and very specific gifts. The principle for us here is that 'our' calling is to be a witness for Jesus. So our "Woe to me" should be if we don't seek to be a positive witness for him...

Sharing our faith is not something most of us find very easy - We are, generally speaking, a reserved nation. We might fear being seen as a religious weirdo. We might fear peoples' reaction. We might fear being accused of being 'non pc' if we state there's only one way to God. We might fear not knowing what to say or other people having a stronger argument than us. We might fear not knowing the answers to peoples' questions. We might fear rejection or exclusion or isolation if we nail our colours to the mast. At the end of the day... it's far easier saying and doing nothing... isn't it?

Maybe Christians have never found it easy sharing their faith? Maybe that's why the very first believers, even whilst still so pumped up from Pentecost prayed, "Enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness" (Acts 4: 29). How often have we prayed that? We may have prayed for people 'not yet Christians' to become Christians, and I'm sure that has merit, but there is no biblical example of that - not one! It's easier though if we haven't got to engage with people isn't it?! The Bible tells us to pray for opportunities to witness (Col 4: 3), for courage to speak up (Rom 1: 10), for those who will believe (John 17: 10), for the rapid spread of the Christian message (Ephesians 6: 19), and for more to be involved in mission (Matt 9: 38).

The biblical pattern seems to recognise this is tough but to ask God for help in speaking out.

Maybe Jesus knew of our struggles, which is why he assured his Disciples, "Do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking but the Holy Spirit" (Mark 13: 11). What an encouragement - it's not about us trying to win arguments at all! It's about us trusting that there is one who is very much with us and wants to help us in our struggles. Salvation itself is God's work, not ours.

It's ok to not find this easy. It may even be preferable as it forces us to trust in God and not in ourselves, which is what we would do if we thought this was an easy thing to do - who needs God?! > >
> SONG

Message 2 - Seek to be yourself - How can we be ourselves but also 'reach out' to others with the Gospel when for many of us that's too tough...? You don't need to be extrovert, or articulate, or know all the answers. When we think of sharing our faith, we need to remove from our minds any unhelpful stereotypes of 'Evangelism' and just think about who we are, how we've been wired, and how we can best be a witness whilst being ourselves.

As for what that might look like practise, we turn, as we always should do, to the Bible. Are there different ways people in the New Testament sought to share their faith?

Although probably not an exhaustive list, here are 7 different 'approaches'...

Relationally - Matthew, previously a tax collector, had people he knew over for a meal (Luke 5: 29). Power of food! There is a spiritual gift of hospitality. Takes time & effort. Some people will only be reached through people building genuine relationships with them. Covid may well have made that impossible this last year but many people are now eager to meet up. Why not invite a couple over for drinks in your garden? Or suggest meeting up for a walk with friends, ending up at your local for a glass of Ribena?! Often this can be a starting point for a building a bridge where, over time, Jesus might then walk across.

Practically – Dorcas (Acts 9: 36) “always doing good and helping the poor”. Behind the scenes, often getting little credit, but they notice what others don’t and they get on and do something about it. Some people will never be reached unless they see God’s love in action and feel cared for by what has been done for them. “People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.”

Academically – Paul was educated, respected, knew what he believed and was able to defend it and present truth in a logical fashion. Some people will never be reached until they see that Christianity does not require blind faith but is a reasonable faith that can be supported by historical, literary, and archaeological evidence.

Proactively – We read that “day after day... and from house to house they never stopped teaching and proclaiming that Jesus is the Messiah” (Acts 5: 24). There are some people who will only ever be reached through someone turning up on their patch, whether that be at home or at work. The JESUS Video Project is testimony to that.

Directly – Peter, bold, to the point, didn’t mince his words. Any surprise God chose Peter at Pentecost? Some people need someone to confront them, and to challenge them to make a decision. They will only ever be reached if someone is willing to issue that challenge to them.

Through sharing your story – Man born blind then healed. He didn’t enter into theological debate or invite people to anything, just said what God had done for him when he was asked. “One thing I do know, I was blind but now I see!” (John 9: 25). Some people will only ever be reached if they know what difference God has made to our lives. Peter tells us that we should “always be ready to give an answer to people for the hope you have”. That’s not Bible bashing, it’s simply answering a question if you’re ever asked about what you believe or why you go to Church!

Through Invitation – Samaritan woman. “Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did” (John 4: 29). Loads came, but only because they’d had an invite! Some people are waiting for an invitation. We might not know who those people are but with Churches only just re-opening maybe this is a new season for some of us to consider inviting someone to Church? They can only say no! Whether they come or not isn’t the point. The fact is, some ‘might’ IF they were invited...

Conclusion - Jesus has saved us from sin, brought us into God’s family, given us His Spirit, promised us eternal life, and recruited us to work for and with him – what a privilege! Not only to ‘come’ to Jesus but to ‘go’ for Jesus. We have this commission stated 5 times in 5 different books of the Bible, Matt 28: 19, Mk 16: 15, Luke 24: 47, John 20: 21, Acts 1: 8. God really wants us to get this! ‘The Great Commission’ must never become ‘The Great Suggestion’. Our wrestling should be with ‘how’ we do this, not whether we should.

“How can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?” (Rom 10: 14) was a valid question from Paul to the Christians at Rome. The best thing we can give anyone is a taste of God’s love.

But do remember this... Don’t try to be someone you’re not. God made you as you.