IT ISN'T ABOUT GOING: THE GREAT COMMISSION 9

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Category: Bible & Mission

Everyone knows that the *Great Commission* says 'Go into all the world' or words to that effect.

Actually, it doesn't.

When we read the Gospels, we have to remember that we are reading an account, written in Greek, of a discourse given in Aramaic, with the whole lot translated into English. While the central thrust and message is retained through all of this, some of the finer nuances and structures are inevitably lost. That is an inevitable part of the translation process - sorry and all that.

Some languages have grammatical structures which simply don't exist in other languages and we come across one of those in the last couple of verses in Matthew 28.

> *Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.*

In English, the command to "go and" is quite common. We say things like "Go and buy a pint of milk", or "Go and see if your dad has fixed the car yet"... In our English versions of the Bible, Jesus command to the disciples is presented in this form "Go and make disciples...". So, from a thousand pulpits preachers thunder the missionary call to GO!

But the problem is that the original doesn't say that. In Greek, there are four commands; go, make disciples, baptize and teach and the central one of those is make disciples. First and foremost, Jesus commands us to make disciples, which can be done wherever we find ourselves.

Chris Wright explains this in his wonderful book The mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative where he says that 'go'

> *... is not an imperative at all in the text but a particle of attendant circumstances, an assumption â€“ something taken for granted? Jesus did not primarily command his disciples to go; he commanded them to make disciples. (p.34)*

There will be those who 'go' as in travel long distances to make disciples, but others are commanded to make disciples where they are. This is clearer from Luke's account of the same discourse in Acts 1 where he talks about witnessing to Jesus in Jerusalem (that's right here) and the ends of the earth.

In a sense, this sounds like an exercise in semantics, but I believe that there is an important point that we need to face up to here. Too much missionary theology and practice has been built around the command to GO. We have put those who cross cultures and who cross the sea onto a pedestal and made them into a special class of people: Missionaries. The problem is, all Christians are called to be

missionaries; not just a special class.

Because we have identified a special group of people as missionaries, we often downplay or even ignore the missional calling of the rest of the Church. People like ourselves can put exciting pictures of exotic places on our blogs and Facebook pages because we are *real* missionaries. But the truth is that it may be far harder to be a consistant witness to Christ in a British workplace than in an African village. Christians are far more likely to face hostility and abuse in the UK than they are in many parts of the so-called mission field.

For some people, the only *going* they ever do is the daily commute - but they are missionaries, called to witness to Christ and to make disciples in their workplace and that can be blooming difficult. The London Institute for Contemporary Christianity has many excellent resources for people who want to take their call to mission in the workplace seriously - check them out.

The other side of the 'Go' issue is the whole question of the missionary call. I don't want to get into this one in any depth, but I'd just like to point out that all of God's people have a call to mission. There is no special call that people like Sue and I receive that the rest of us don't get. The whole concept of a special call is built on a few verses of Scripture taken out of context and gets far more prominence in the life of the church and misison agencies than it deserves!