

Five Verbs

A sermon in the series
**“Summer Memories:
Scripture Verses Worth Remembering”**
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Rocky River Presbyterian Church, Rocky River, Ohio
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- Isaiah 6:1-8⁸ Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I; send me!”
- Matthew 28:16-20¹⁹ 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,²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”
- Sermon-in-a-sentence: What Jesus asked his apostles to do applies to us today as well.

The summer before my senior year in high school I spent a week as a camp counselor at Camp Emmaus in Mt. Morris, Illinois, the church camp I had attended as a child. The director of the camp announced at dinner one night that in order to be admitted to the dining hall for lunch the next day every camper – and counselor – would have to recite from memory a Bible verse of their own choosing. And it couldn’t be John 11:35 (“Jesus wept” – the shortest verse in the Bible).

I started prowling around in the Bible. I found some verses I had never seen before. I decided to memorize two... from Song of Solomon, Chapter 7. It came my turn to recite to the director standing guard at the dining room door. I said:

²Your navel is a rounded bowl that never lacks mixed wine....

³Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle.

Your next meal probably doesn’t depend on memorizing the Bible, but there are benefits to committing to memory some words of scripture. In fact, you probably already have memorized some scripture. For instance, fill in the blank if I say, “And in that region there were shepherds in the fields... (keeping watch over their flock by night.)”¹

Many of us have turned to the Bible at particular times in our lives, especially when faced with scary or uncertain situations. We have sought comfort, reassurance, inspiration, strengthening of hope. But what if you don’t happen to have a Bible handy, and your phone battery won’t allow you to access a Bible app on the internet? In situations like that you’ll realize how glad you are that you took the time to commit to memory a few key passages of the Bible.

That’s what this summer series is about: “Summer Memories – Scripture Verses Worth Remembering” will examine eight of the “Top 25 Most Read Bible Verses” according to a Bible study website.² We’ll consider their meaning and then I’ll suggest ways that you can commit those verses to memory.

¹ Luke 2:8

² “The 25 Most Read Bible Verses” <http://www.biblestudytools.com/topical-verses/the-25-most-read-bible-verses/>
accessed 6/22/2017

Today's verse is actually two verses, and is the longest of the Bible verses I'm encouraging you to memorize this summer. It's from the final verses of Matthew's gospel, Chapter 28, verses 19-20. It's often referred to as "The Great Commission" because in it Jesus tells his followers (the disciples of old, and you and me today) what they are to do: he commissions them; he gives them marching orders. And yes, it is longer than "Jesus wept." But here's why it'll be easy for you: in reality you just have to memorize five words. That's it. If you remember five words, you'll remember the entire two verses.

Look at the text in your bulletin or your personal Bible. Let's locate and underline or circle five specific verbs there. Start in verse 19. In most translations the very first word is the same: it's the verb "go" used in an imperative mood to indicate a command or request. Circle that.

Next circle the verb "make" (as in "make disciples of all nations"). Then find the verb "baptize"; circle it. (Why is the word "baptize" in brackets? Because in the New Revised Standard Version Bible the actual word is "baptizing." For my purpose this morning I took the liberty of modifying the word slightly, along with the next verb "teaching". I think it's more important that you're able to remember the sense or meaning of a verse than it is to memorize every exact, specific word.) So you've circled the verbs "go," "make," "baptize," and "teach." The fifth verb you can circle is "remember," as in "remember, I am with you always...."

So what are the five verbs? Say them with me: "go... make... baptize... teach... remember." Commit those words to your heart, and you now know the last words of Jesus recorded in Matthew's gospel. When you remember those five words, they will prompt you to remember the rest of the verses:

"Go" stands on its own: "Get out into the world and do something with this Good News you now know!"

"Make" ... what? Make disciples. Make followers. Not merely people who claim membership privileges in some local congregation. Not just church members. Disciples are people who live a different kind of life because they know Jesus the Son of God the Father. Who qualifies to become a disciple? Are we done if we lead our boyfriend or spouse or neighbor or best friend to embrace Jesus? That's not what he thinks. He said, "...make disciples of all nations." "Nations" is another word for peoples—groups, classes, ethnicities, races, genders... everyone is entitled to be invited to follow. Make disciples of all peoples.

So how do we do that? "*Baptize....*" Bring them into the fellowship of Christ's church, the embodiment of Christ on earth. Baptism isn't simply a transformation of an individual; it's an incorporation into a community committed to following the way of Jesus. Bible scholars note that the "Trinitarian formula" ("in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit") was created in the early years of the Christian churches in Syria as an expression to be used in worship.³ The Christian Church's complex teaching of the Trinity (i.e., one God in three Persons) was developed later. That's how Matthew, writing around the year 70 A.D., was able to put the Trinitarian formula on the lips of Jesus here. Today, of course, the Christian tradition baptizes in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. So we *Go... make* disciples of all nations... *baptizing* them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The next verb is "*teach.*" Jesus doesn't want his work to die with the deaths of his apostles; he wants each generation to hear and believe the good news of the gospel. So when we remember the verb "teach" we know that we are to teach others to obey all that Jesus told us: how to love, how to trust, how to forgive, how to accept forgiveness, the joy of generosity, the

³ New Interpreters Bible, Vol. VIII. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995, 504

grace of humility, the sacrifice that often results from obedience. We go... make disciples of all nations... baptizing them into the community of faith which knows God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit... and teaching them to obey all that Jesus commanded.

The last verb is deceptively simple: “remember.” Not simply to remember these two verses of scripture; we are to remember that Jesus is still with us. He’s not a memory passed down through the generations by an oral tradition. He’s not a mythic figure of an ancient culture. He’s not the hero of an ancient book. As one part of the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit that are one holy and living God, Jesus is present and active and engaged with us in a way that we may not see with our eyes but we know in our hearts.

Centuries before Jesus the psalmist voiced confidence in the imminence of the almighty and invisible God when in Psalm 121 he asked, then answered:

- ¹ I lift up my eyes to the hills –
from where will my help come?
- ² My help comes from the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.
- ³ He will not let your foot be moved;
he who keeps you will not slumber.
- ⁴ He who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.

God the Son “keeps” us in the way that a mother watches her child: the child goes on its way often unaware that it is under the mother’s watchful, protective and loving care. Jesus tells us to “remember” that he is with us always.

Being able to call up scripture from memory is a blessing; it’s not a bragging right. Memorizing scripture can offer you assurance in times of uncertainty, strength in the face of temptation, comfort when you come into distressing times. Being able to speak words of scripture can give you hope when you feel overwhelmed and can help you express inexpressible joy and gratitude when you’re awash in blessing.

So think of a time later today that you’re going to remember and recite this morning’s “five verbs” – maybe when you park your car, or when you speak a word of blessing before a meal, or as you slip into your jammies. Remember the five verbs – *go, make, baptize, teach, remember* – and after you remember the verbs, “fill in the blanks” [without looking, let’s see how much of it we already remember!]:b

- **Go** therefore and
- **make** disciples of all nations,
- **[baptize]** them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and
- **[teach]** them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And
- **remember**, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”