

## ***Before You Go*** **Matthew 28:16-20**

Wayne Eberly  
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Go! That word was resonating in the hearts of 17,000 college students as the dynamic speaker wrapped up what had been an amazing call to take the gospel of Jesus Christ into the world. Marilyn Laszlo had traveled as a missionary with Wycliffe Bible Translators down a river deep into the heart of Papua New Guinea to bring God's word to a forgotten people. She brought to life the process of translating the bible into a new language. She brought to life the way the word of God brought life as the people who heard the word of God's great love in Jesus Christ became new believers. That message alone was enough to make 17,000 college students all want to go and make disciples of all the nations.

But there was another part of her message which actually made an even deeper impact. While she was busy translating the bible into a new language, a visitor arrived in the small remote village she was working in. The person had traveled from another village. Their village needed medical help. The visitor, through conversation with one of the people in the village where Marilyn Laszlo was working, learned that she was there putting God's word into the language of their tribe. The visitor turned to Marilyn Laszlo and asked if she could come to his village. She apologized and said it would take all her time in this one village.

Eventually, years later, Marilyn Laszlo was able to travel to that other village and at least make a visit. Upon her arrival she noticed that in the middle of the village was a newly constructed building.

*I knew it had just been built and so I said to this fellow, "What is that building there in the center of the village?"*

*He said, "Oh, that is God's house. That is our church."*

*I said, "Your church? Do you have a mission here?"*

*"Oh, no, we have never had a mission here."*

*I said, "Well, do you have a pastor here, you know, someone that comes to preach God's Word?"*

*"Oh, no, we've never had a pastor here."*

*I said, "Well, is there someone here in the village that can read and write Pidgin English who holds services in your church?"*

*"Oh, no! There is no one here that can read or write - we have no books."*

*I looked at him and said, "Then, what is that building for?"*

*He said, "Well, we saw the little church in your village and our people decided to build a church too and now we're waiting. We're waiting for*

*someone to come and tell us about God in our talk - in our language." I turned and the tears started to come. I have never seen that kind of faith demonstrated anywhere. Friends, out in the middle of the jungle stands that little church and today they are still waiting ... waiting for someone to come and tell them about Jesus in their own language.* (This speech was given at Urbana '81, and can be found at the website Urbana.org)

Go! That word was on the heart of each of the 17,000 students gathered in the massive arena on the campus of the University of Illinois for the Urbana Mission Conference at the end of 1981. The idea that there were people waiting for God's word, waiting for someone to bring God's word to them, that was so inspiring. Go! I was there in 1981. Julie was there in 1981. We heard God say Go! That Urbana Mission Conference instilled in us a desire to Go and to serve God, proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ.

But there were other messages that week that caused us to give deep thought to what it means to Go. During that week, a speaker named Elisabeth Elliot stood before the crowd of 17,000 and told the story of her husband Jim. Serving in Ecuador Jim Elliot and his fellow missionaries made contact with a remote tribe. Elliot and the others made plans to share the gospel with the members of the tribe. The tribe was making other plans. A group of some ten members of the tribe rose up and attacked Jim Elliot and his fellow missionaries, putting them all to death. Elisabeth Elliot stood before 17,000 college students and told the story of her husband Jim, who died as a martyr for the Christian faith. Like Marilyn Laszlo, Elisabeth Elliot was calling us to Go. But in calling us to Go, she was also saying, "Before you go, count the cost." Before Jim Elliot answered the call to Go, he had counted the cost. In a journal of his were found these words, "He is no fool who gives that which he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose."

Go! But before you go, count the cost. Go! But before you go, remember that you are not called to go on some mission that is glamorous, on some mission filled with glory, on some mission with guarantees of success, or on some mission where your name is in the spotlight. Go, but before you go remember you go to make disciples. You go to make disciples of Jesus Christ. Disciples are followers. You go to make followers of Jesus Christ. You cannot make disciples unless you are a disciple yourself.

Go, but before you go, remember what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ did not come to be served...Jesus Christ came to serve. Jesus Christ did not come to save his life...Jesus Christ came to give his life. Jesus Christ did not fly over this world on the wings of an angel, safely soaring above life's trials and tribulations...Jesus Christ entered this world as a helpless infant...Jesus Christ

embraced the suffering and sadness of this world...Jesus Christ touched the wounds and tasted the bitter tears of people whose lives were broken...Jesus Christ walked a mile in our shoes...Jesus Christ did more than walk a mile in our shoes...Jesus Christ walked the hill known as Calvary, where he laid down his life. Go, but before you go, be sure you have laid down your life for Jesus Christ.

I was leading a class several years ago when a young seminary student stood up and preached a powerful sermon. He chose something else for his title, but for all intents and purposes his title was Go!

*“Seven years ago, I packed my bags and together with a handful of Christians from around the world, we moved to Canada’s poorest and most dysfunctional neighborhood, Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside. This small, four by eight city block area is home to 3000 homeless, 5000 cocaine and heroin addicts, and over a thousand prostitutes. Cheap and potent drugs from the nearby ports have destroyed this community. Walking down the streets each day I would pass scores of people shooting up in plain sight, and on virtually every block a woman would ask me if I was lonely. A homeless friend of mine once described the Downtown Eastside as a valley of skeletons, a valley filled with emaciated corpses eaten away by drugs.”* As this student continued, he told us his sermon text was from Ezekiel 37, a story of a valley of dry bones. The question is whether God has the ability to bring life to those dry bones.

*“For those of us who had relocated to the Downtown Eastside, we sensed God calling us to a ministry of hospitality. That was our job, our role to play. Now, Martha Stewart and the whole multi-billion-dollar Hospitality Industry have co-opted that word to mean the entertainment of friends. But biblical hospitality is about the welcoming in of those people who are not normally the recipients of welcome. So, we opened up our home, and welcomed our neighbors in, treating them like family. They’d cook with us, eat with us, cry with us, celebrate with us, and even live with us while they waited to get into a drug rehab program. And as we’d share life together, we saw the lives of many neighbors restored.*

*One guy, his name is Kevin, he used to shoot heroin into his veins just down the street from our house. One day, while still in addiction, he heard a teammate of mine speak about ministry in Cambodia. Afterwards, Kevin declared that God was calling him to be a missionary amongst the poor in Cambodia. This was too preposterous of an idea for me to believe. Thankfully, my teammate Craig believed that dry bones can live. So, he started mentoring Kevin.... For the past four years, Kevin has been living and ministering in a poor slum community in Cambodia. And he’s an amazing missionary! In fact, this year, he’ll be a keynote speaker at the International Society of Urban Missions.”* (Sermon preached by Jason Porterfield for Fuller Seminary Homiletics Course, Fall 2013)

Go! But before you go, remember you do not go in your own power. Jesus sends us. Jesus tells us to go. And so, we go in the power and with the power of Jesus Christ. Go!

Go! But before you go, remember you do not go alone. Jesus said Go! When Jesus said go, he also said, “And lo, I am always with you, even to the end of the age.” Go, but before you go, know that Jesus is always with you. You never go alone.

A medical doctor stood up to speak to that gathering of 17,000 college students at the Urbana Mission Conference in 1981. Her name was Dr. Helen Roseveare. A tiny wisp of a woman, Helen Roseveare had counted the cost. She had been captured and held prisoner at one time for five months, enduring the horrible suffering of being raped during her time of captivity. But Helen Roseveare had heard God’s call to Go! She returned to the mission field. When Dr. Helen Roseveare visited our church in California, she told the story of a mother who died in childbirth at a mission hospital in Central Africa. The motherless baby was in grave danger of dying. Helen Roseveare noted they would have difficulty keeping the baby alive with no incubator and no electricity, knowing that even on the equator the nights could get chilly with treacherous drafts.

“A student-midwife went for the box we had for such babies and for the cotton wool that the baby would be wrapped in. Another went to stoke up the fire and fill a hot water bottle. She came back shortly, in distress, to tell me that in filling the bottle, it had burst. Rubber perishes easily in tropical climates. ‘...and it is our last hot water bottle!’ she exclaimed. As in the West, it is no good crying over spilled milk; so, in Central Africa it might be considered no good crying over a burst water bottle. They do not grow on trees, and there are no drugstores down forest pathways. ‘All right,’ I said, ‘Put the baby as near the fire as you safely can; sleep between the baby and the door to keep it free from drafts. Your job is to keep the baby warm.’”

“The following noon, as I did most days, I went to have prayers with many of the orphanage children who chose to gather with me. I gave the youngsters various suggestions of things to pray about and told them about the tiny baby. I explained our problem about keeping the baby warm enough, mentioning the hot water bottle. The baby could so easily die if it got chilled. I also told them about the two-year-old sister, crying because her mother had died. During the prayer time, one ten-year-old girl, Ruth, prayed with the usual blunt consciousness of our African children. ‘Please, God,’ she prayed, ‘send us a water bottle. It’ll be no good tomorrow, God, the baby’ll be dead; so, please send it this afternoon.’ While I gasped inwardly at the audacity of the prayer, she added by way of corollary, ‘And while You are about it, would You please send a dolly for the little girl so she’ll know You really love her?’ As often with children’s prayers, I was put on the spot. Could I honestly say, ‘Amen?’ I just did not believe that God could do this. Oh, yes, I know that He can

do everything: The Bible says so, but there are limits, aren't there? The only way God could answer this particular prayer would be by sending a parcel from the homeland. I had been in Africa for almost four years at that time, and I had never, ever received a parcel from home. Anyway, if anyone did send a parcel, who would put in a hot water bottle? I lived on the equator!"

"Halfway through the afternoon, while I was teaching in the nurses' training school, a message was sent that there was a car at my front door. By the time that I reached home, the car had gone, but there, on the veranda, was a large twenty-two-pound parcel! I felt tears pricking my eyes. I could not open the parcel alone; so, I sent for the orphanage children. Together we pulled off the string, carefully undoing each knot. We folded the paper, taking care not to tear it unduly. Excitement was mounting. Some thirty or forty pairs of eyes were focused on the large cardboard box. From the top, I lifted out brightly colored, knitted jerseys. Eyes sparkled as I gave them out. Then, there were the knitted bandages for the leprosy patients, and the children began to look a little bored. Next, came a box of mixed raisins and sultanas -- that would make a nice batch of buns for the weekend. As I put my hand in again, I felt the...could it really be? I grasped it and pulled it out. Yes, 'A brand-new rubber, hot water bottle!' I cried. I had not asked God to send it; I had not truly believed that He could. Ruth was in the front row of the children. She rushed forward, crying out, 'If God has sent the bottle, He must have sent the dolly, too!' Rummaging down to the bottom of the box, she pulled out the small, beautifully dressed dolly. Her eyes shone: She had never doubted! Looking up at me, she asked, 'Can I go over with you, Mummy, and give this dolly to that little girl, so she'll know that Jesus really loves her?'"

"That parcel had been on the way for five whole months, packed up by my former Sunday School class, whose leader had heard and obeyed God's prompting to send a hot water bottle, even to the equator. One of the girls had put in a dolly for an African child -- five months earlier in answer to the believing prayer of a ten-year-old to bring it 'That afternoon!'"<sup>1</sup>

Go! Go knowing that Jesus is able to do immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine.

Go! Go in the name of Jesus Christ who loves this world and has given his life for this world.

Go! Go with the words of Jesus ringing in your ears and fanning a flame in your hearts.

Go! Go with Jesus. He said, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Go! Go! Go! Go! Go! And as we go may God bless us and keep us every step of the way.

Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> As told by Helen Rosevear in a testimony at Thomas Road Baptist Church