

## Matt. 28:16-20

### I. The disciples encountered Jesus in Galilee after the resurrection (16-17)

#### A. The eleven disciples went into Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus instructed them (16)

Matthew specifically noted the number of disciples as eleven. This is the twelve original disciples minus Judas Iscariot, who had betrayed Jesus, and then killed himself afterward.

We learn from the other Gospels that the disciples had seen the risen Jesus earlier in Jerusalem. Matthew here informs us that they met the resurrected Jesus in Galilee at a prearranged place. They went to this place, as they had been instructed.

#### B. They encountered Him and hesitantly worshipped (17)

##### 1. They saw Him and worshipped (17a-b)

###### a And when they saw Him (17a)

Literally, “seeing Him” but this is probably a temporal relationship, “after they saw Him” or “when they saw Him”

But there is also implied a cause/effect relationship with the next proposition, “they worshipped because they saw Him”

As with the other resurrection appearances recorded in the New Testament, the emphasis is that they actually saw Him. It was not in their imagination or just a metaphorical encounter. They actually saw the genuine presence of the real Jesus after He had risen from the dead. This explains their response in the next proposition

###### b They worshipped (17b)

This is an understandable response, but in another sense, it is a totally unexpected response.

For a faithful Jew, it was unthinkable to bow down in worship to another human being, and so, none of the disciples would ever have done this to anyone else in any other circumstance. To worship anything except God would be to break the first and second of God’s Ten Commandments, and so the disciples would never do it.

And yet they did it. This means that they had concluded, because of His resurrection, that Jesus was not just a human. His resurrection had proved that His claims to be equal with God to be true, and so the disciples worshipped Him as God.

In other words, for a faithful, first century Jew, who was committed to the idea of monotheism – that there is only One God – it was forbidden to worship anything else. And it likely took some time over the course of their living with Jesus, for the disciples to fully come to the realization that Jesus was equal with God. Because of their commitment to monotheism, they did not conclude that Jesus was a second God, in addition to the Father. But they concluded that Jesus (and the Holy Spirit as well, as we’ll see in v. 19) was the SAME God as the Father, Whom they knew as the God of the Old Testament. This is the beginning of the doctrine that would later be called the “Trinity.”

##### 2. But some doubted/hesitated (17c)

This word translated doubted or hesitated signifies an uncertainty and hesitancy in the disciples. This is understandable in these circumstances.

It could mean that they had some doubt about the resurrection, whether they were truly seeing a man alive whom they knew was dead just a few days earlier. It would be natural to be at least somewhat skeptical in these circumstances.

This could also mean that they hesitated in expressing their worship because it was so counter to their Jewish upbringing to worship anything besides God. It may have taken some time for them to wrap their minds around the fact that Jesus was God incarnate, and so worshipping Him may have seemed taboo for a while.

## II. Jesus' response to the disciples (18-20)

### A. Jesus approached and spoke (18a-c)

This section is not intended to move the narrative forward, as much as it functions to introduce what Jesus said to them, which is the main focus of this passage

#### 1. And after He approached (18a)

Like "seeing Him" above, this is literally a bare participle, but it likely has a temporal significance, showing it to be a contemporaneous or slightly earlier action

#### 2. Jesus spoke to them (18b-c)

##### a Jesus spoke to them (18b)

This proposition introduces the act of Jesus speaking, and the next proposition introduces the content of what He spoke. This is a common Hebrew way of introducing dialogue

##### b Saying: (18c)

This introduces the content of what Jesus said, which covers the rest of this passage

### B. What He said – the Great Commission (18d-20)

#### 1. Because Christ has all authority, train all nations to live under His authority (18d-20a)

##### a All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me (18d)

Jesus claimed all authority. This could have the implication of all kinds of authority, or authority in all kinds of areas. In other words, His authority is broad in spectrum, covering every kind of sphere of influence and authority. This is confirmed by the phrases "in heaven" and "on earth." Jesus has all authority on earth, over human issues and human history. But Jesus also has all authority in heaven, the realm of angels and the dwelling place of God Himself. It is not very shocking for Jesus to claim authority over angels and demons because He had already demonstrated that authority throughout His ministry. But, for Jesus to claim all authority in heaven is either to claim to have authority over God, or to claim to BE God. And the latter option is obviously the one He intended. This claim would be absolutely scandalous and blasphemous if it were not true. But His resurrection proved that it is true. It is logically inconsistent to claim to believe what Jesus taught, yet to deny that He was God incarnate, because that is one of His claims.

Not only does this statement mean that Jesus' authority is comprehensive in scope, it also means that His authority is comprehensive without limit. He has ALL authority. His authority is not limited or shared. There is no authority that He does not have. Jesus, both by His nature as God incarnate, and because of His accomplishments of atonement and resurrection, has all authority. Jesus is sovereign Lord over every area of your life, because He is sovereign Lord over everything in the entire world.

And in this verse, Jesus said that this authority had been given to Him, presumably by His Father. This authority is formally granted by the One Who has the authority to grant it. In one sense, Jesus always had this same authority, because He is God. But in another sense, in His new function as the God-Man and leader of the new humanity, this authority was given in His new role as Risen Savior and King, as the result of His accomplishments in the cross and resurrection.

He now reigns as King over the entire universe. His Kingdom is a real, present reality, even though it is not yet fully consummated.

b The inference from His Authority - command to make disciples (19-20a)

This section begins with the word “therefore.” This means that the command in these verses is a direct result of Jesus having all authority, and His authority is the reason why this command should be obeyed with utmost seriousness and fervency.

There are four verbal ideas in this section. However, the grammatical forms mark one as the prominent idea, and the other three as being subordinate. The main command is to make disciples, and the other three ideas are subordinate to this command. They most likely describe the way that they were to make disciples. In other words, they were to make disciples by doing these other three things. The relationship of the subordinate ideas will be discussed in more detail below.

1) The command to make disciples (19a-b)

a) Therefore, by going (19a)

The idea of “going” is marked as a subordinate idea to “making disciples” by the grammar used. And yet, it is placed first, which shows emphasis.

There are two main possibilities how the idea of going is related to the command to make disciples:

First, it may function as a coordinate command.

Even though it is not an imperative, it may function as an imperative because of its close connection to the imperative to make disciples. In this case, they would be translated as a series of two connected commands - “Go, and make disciples”

If this is the case, it emphasizes that the great commission is for the entire world, and so, Christ’s people need to take the initiative to reach the entire world. This is true, and world missions is one of the main tasks of the entire church, because there is a worldwide aim of God’s blessing going back to the promise to Abraham. We are blessed to be a blessing. And we should somehow contribute to the message of Jesus reaching every people group. And logically, this means that the church needs to leave where it is at, and go to where unreached people are, so that they can hear the Gospel.

However, we need to be careful here to not press this too hard. There are many mission minded people who will use this verse to speak as if every Christian is sinning if they do not personally go to a foreign nation. And this goes beyond what Jesus is saying here. Not only does Afghanistan need to be discipled, but so does Atlanta. We need to make disciples not only in New Guinea, but also in New York. We don’t just need disciples in the House of Representatives, we need to make disciples in our own houses. And the primary disciple making role for parents is toward their own children. So, this word is never an either/or choice, to go or stay, but it is a both/and, which includes reaching all nations, as is shown in the next proposition

It is also possible that this word “going” functions as attending circumstances in reference to Deuteronomy 6:4-9

In this passage, it refers to parents teaching their children about God “when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.” In other words, they are to talk about God throughout all the normal activities of daily life. They are to train their children while they are going about their normal business.

This would mean that Jesus commands His followers to be making disciples throughout the course of all their everyday activities, as they

are going. We should make disciples when we are on the job. We should make disciples when we are at home. We should make disciples at school. Everyone can do this, and everyone should do this. Of course, this does not mean that we can neglect our work or school in order to make disciples. There is a proper way to do it at work or school, etc. Just like it would not be appropriate for you to be playing golf on company time, but it may be appropriate to mention that you love to play golf, and invite your co-worker to play a round after work. In the same way, it might not be appropriate to extensively teach about Christ when you should be working. But it would be entirely appropriate to mention Him in the course of normal conversation with co-workers, and invite them to talk about it more outside of the work environment. It would be appropriate to encourage and mentor a co-worker in their discipleship in the midst of ordinary workplace conversation as long as it does not take away from the quality of your work, which should be kept high as a testimony to Christ. Every part of life can be used to make disciples. We should make disciples as we are going through life.

b) **Make disciples of all nations (19b)**

This is the main command of the great commission, and so it is important to understand what it means to make disciples.

Making disciples simply means to help people become disciples. The term “making” has absolutely no connotation of compulsion or force. Christianity, unlike other religions, cannot be imposed. People must be convinced and led to the truth with the working of the Holy Spirit underwriting our disciple making efforts.

And the term disciple combines the meanings of the words “learner” and “follower.” It is somewhat similar to the word apprentice. An apprentice is a person who learns a skill or trade by attaching themselves to a master, following them, working for them, and learning from them everything about the trade. To be a disciple means to follow Jesus and learn from Him. And that raises the question – “What do we learn from Jesus?” And the answer is “Life, the universe, everything.” A disciple learns from Jesus in every area of life, because Jesus is Lord of every area of life. We learn from Jesus what life truly is and how we should live it. We learn how to live it well. And especially, we learn how to inherit eternal life and live forever in His Kingdom, in relationship with the King. Because Jesus is our creator, it is only fitting that we should learn our created purpose and how to live it out from Him. And our created purpose is to know and serve Him.

And being a disciple means learning from Jesus under His authority, in obedience to His authority, and because of His authority. Remember that the command to make disciples flows directly from the fact that Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth. And so being a disciple is directly related to living under the sovereign authority of Jesus. There is no true discipleship without obedience. Now this may seem like a frightful and harsh prospect – to live totally under the authority of someone else. And we are right to resist this kind of total submission to another human. However, we must remember that Jesus is not just another sinful human. He is God incarnate, Whose rule is good and gracious beyond our ability to comprehend. He is a good sovereign, Who

has proved that He works for our blessing and benefit. So, it is a delight, rather than a chore, to live under His authority.

So, making disciples means to teach people about Jesus and train them to know and follow Him in every area of life. Therefore, making disciples is so much more than just making converts or convincing people to join an organization. Making disciples is a comprehensive task that covers every part of a person's life, helping them to experience an overarching change of mind, attitudes, and actions. And most importantly, it means training them into learning directly from Jesus Himself, and following Him with complete loyalty. Because they are to be disciples of Jesus, and not of us, or of our organization.

And this assumes that the one making disciples is already a disciple, because you cannot teach what you don't know. In order to make disciples, we need to be growing disciples, with a growing knowledge of Who Jesus is and what He has done. At the same time, we don't need to wait until we are experts before we can begin to make disciples. As long as we are following Jesus ourselves, we can bring others along to the point we have already attained, and hopefully we will grow together.

And this command is to make disciples of all nations. Jesus was not just the Jewish Messiah to restore the Kingdom of Israel. He is the eternal Son of God, Who restores and reigns over every nation. No one is able to personally disciple every nation, but the combined effort of the entire church is to reach every people group on the planet. Again, this is related to the fact that Jesus is Lord over the entire world, and His plan all along was to bless every nation by bringing them under His Kingdom rule. This means that discipleship and disciple making may not be one-size-fits-all. The truth of Christ has been shown to transcend cultures, because Jesus is above every culture. And therefore, discipleship fits and works in every cultural situation, both challenging and reinforcing every culture in some ways. And we must make disciples in a way that makes sense and connects with every culture, and not just attempt to import one cultural expression of Christianity into another.

## 2) The means of making disciples (19c-20a)

These two propositions are related to the command to make disciples by being the means Jesus gave in order to fulfill that command. In other words, if someone were to ask Jesus, "How should we make disciples?" or "What activities should we do in order to make disciples?" He would answer by giving these two activities – by baptizing them, and by teaching them to keep my commandments.

### a) Baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit (19c)

The first means that Jesus gave was to baptize people into the name of the Triune God.

Baptism is a rite of initiation, admitting someone into the community of faith by briefly plunging them under water. It was practiced in the time of Jesus to initiate gentiles into the Jewish faith. And John the Baptist used it as a symbol for repentance and turning back to God. It also had a connotation of washing and purification. Later Paul connected baptism symbolically with death to old life and resurrection to new life. For Christians, baptism is a response to new birth, and serves as a symbol of, and confirmation of the new birth. In the early church, baptism happened after someone had been evangelized and instructed to the point where there was good evidence of the new birth. Therefore, baptism is

being initiated into the Christian community, with new status, rights, and responsibilities.

Therefore, Jesus' command to baptize assumes that this includes telling people the good news and instructing them in the truth about Jesus to the point that they give evidence not only of understanding, but of believing and receiving the new birth. Baptizing people represents a serious commitment to win them to faith in Christ and train them so that they show evidence of being a part of His Kingdom.

And the command is to baptize people into the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Notice that the word "name" is singular. There is ONE Name that consists of three phrases. Because there is ONE God Who consists of three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The baptism formula is trinitarian, and shows that the Father, Jesus, and the Spirit are co-equal in the life of the convert because they are co-equal in the Godhead.

And this phrase is literally "baptize them INTO the Name." The phrase "into the name" was used in Jesus time to represent a change of ownership, or to represent the initiation of a relationship. In either case, the person is baptized as a symbol of a new connection with the Triune Godhead and their dedication to Him, and thereby of their initiation into the people of God, the church, on the basis of their having believed in Jesus and been brought into His Spiritual Kingdom by faith.

b) Teaching them to keep all of what I commanded you (20a)

The second means Jesus gave was to teach people to keep all that He commanded.

The word "keep" when used in reference to laws, commandments and teaching basically means to obey. But it has the connotation of persistence, of continuing to obey over the long term. In John 14:15, Jesus said, "if you love me, you will obey what I command." As Paul will stress in later New Testament books, Christians do not obey the Law or God's commands in order to be loved and accepted or in order to earn salvation and good standing with God. However, Christians do obey God's commands and fulfill the Law Because we have, by grace, been given love and acceptance, we have been saved and put in right standing with God.

And so, the Christian life is not just knowing the right things. It is also living them out. Knowledge without heart and action is hypocrisy. This kind of knowledge puffs up, but does not build up. And this kind of faith is dead. True knowledge and faith have a decisive impact on our affections and actions. On the other hand, we can't live it out without having knowledge of the truth. Zeal without knowledge is not good, and usually is counterproductive. Good theology is necessary to live the Christian life.

Notice that Jesus did not say "tell them to obey." Even though it is sometimes helpful, even necessary to command people to do what is right (those with children should agree). And Jesus did not just say "tell them what to obey," although this is a necessary prerequisite to what He was commanding. In this verse, He said "teach them to obey."

This involves teaching what to obey. But more importantly, it involves teaching and modeling how to obey. Remember, that discipleship is like apprenticeship – where the master tells the apprentice what to do, but also shows them how to do it and guides them as they learn to do it for themselves, both by learning from the master's instruction, but also by watching and imitating the master's

example. So, teaching people to obey involves personal example and involvement in their lives on a deeper level than just information transfer. And this also involves teaching and modeling WHY to obey. Motivation is a key factor in obedience. The disciple's motivation for obedience should include the reality that Jesus is Lord, with all authority in Heaven and on earth. And He will stand in judgment over all creation, including His people. But our motivation also includes the reality that Jesus is Love. He has graciously gone to the cross to rescue us. And He has risen from the grave to give us new life. Jesus is lovingly wise and all-knowing. He has our best interest in mind, and His wise instructions will always lead us in the right way. And Jesus is trustworthy. His way is the best in the long run, even though it is sometimes hard in the short term. In other words, we are to teach and model what Paul calls "the obedience of faith." We obey Christ, because we trust Him. Therefore, a large part of making disciples is proclaiming and reminding people of the Gospel, not just to bring them to Christ, but also to empower them with continual motivation for persistent obedience. The Gospel demonstrates that Christ can be trusted in every areal of life. So making disciples is living out, modeling and proclaiming that I can trust Christ with my obedience today because He has rescued me from death and hell and He has my best interest in mind.

We should never expect that people will be trained in obedience without the Gospel, which changes hearts and empowers obedience. The Law will never accomplish obedience, but God's grace leads us to repentance and the obedience of faith. So, Jesus commanded His followers to proclaim the Gospel, to train people and model how to live, in light of what He accomplished by His cross and resurrection. And this, if we truly grasp it, will result in lives of grateful obedience to all that He commanded.

And it says ALL that He commanded. That includes all the content of the Gospel of Matthew. Remember, that Matthew probably wrote his Gospel at least partly in order to be a teaching manual to help in fulfilling this great commission. But all that Jesus commanded also includes the rest of the New Testament, and even the rest of the Bible, properly understood in light of the New Testament. This means that we cannot limit Jesus' commands just to the "red letters" of what Jesus personally said to the first disciples. Because the entire Bible is the Word of God, and is included in all that Jesus commanded us to obey and to train others to obey.

2. And behold, I am with you always until the completion of the age (20b)

This proposition gives another motivating reason for obeying the command which Jesus had just given. Not only does He have all authority, but He will be continually present to aid and sustain them. It is as if Jesus bookended His final commission to His disciples with two major motivations that would strengthen them to be able to fulfill His command.

Jesus started this statement with the interjection "behold." This is a prompter of attention as well as a marker of emphasis. It was an indication, in essence, to pay close attention to what He was about to say, because it was valid and important. It was as if Jesus put His words in bold print and underlined them, "**I am with you always until the completion of the age.**"

His promise to be with them was not just a promise of His presence, even though that is true. It also has the connotation of supportiveness, that He would be standing by them to help, to act for their benefit. It has the connotation that He will be present on their side, on their behalf.

Of course, we learn from the other Gospels and Acts that His continued presence would not be exactly like they had known His presence before. He would ascend to Heaven and send the Holy

Spirit to be His presence among them. And in John's Gospel, He emphasized that His presence via His Holy Spirit would be more beneficial to the disciples than His earthly presence had been up to that point. And all true disciples can be assured that this promise applies to us as well. Jesus, the One with all authority, is supportively present with us by His Spirit, not only so that we can live the Christian life, but also so that we can fulfill the Great Commission.

And the time frame of this promise is both intensive and extensive. It is intensive, in that He promised to be with them always – all the time. That means every day, and every moment of every day, with no gaps or time periods when He would not be present. His promised presence is not intermittent, but is constant. And this applies to every genuine believer. This means that God is not just concerned and involved in major issues of world politics or climactic events. God is also concerned and involved in the everyday lives of all of His people.

And His presence is extensive, in that it will last until the completion of this age. That means as long as this present world lasts, Jesus will be present with His people by His Spirit. And by the way, that does not mean that at the end of this age He will no longer be present. But, as we see in the later New Testament, the completion of this age ushers in the consummation of the next age, when Jesus will be present with His people in an even more immediate and tangible way for all eternity.