

## Week 7—Making Disciples Matthew 28:16-20

Well, this is the final week of our healthy church sermon series. Over the past weeks, we've looked at a number of characteristics of a healthy church in Scripture, and while what we've given you is by no means an exhaustive list of all the things that characterize a healthy church, we have tried to hit some important ones that we don't always see in churches today. This week we're adding a 7<sup>th</sup> characteristic, obedience to our Savior's command to make disciples.

Turn in your Bibles to Matthew 28:16-20, where we see Christ's command to His disciples (and by extension, to us) to make disciples of all the nations. But what is a disciple? It would be helpful if we defined the term to begin with. On your handout you have several definitions. As Jesus uses the term here, a disciple is: a wholehearted follower of Jesus Christ; someone who takes the role of pupil, with Jesus as teacher; and someone who has forsaken his own way of thinking and living in exchange for Jesus'. John Broadus says a disciple is someone who "accepts what [Jesus] says as true because He says it, and submits to His requirements as right because He makes them." It is this kind of person that we must be and this kind of person that we strive to disciple, as God's Spirit works through us.

As we look at this passage, let's begin in vv.16-17 to set the stage for Jesus' command:

vv.16-17 <sup>16</sup> **But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated.** <sup>17</sup>

**When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some were doubtful.**

When v.16 opens, notice that we find the 11 disciples proceeding to Galilee. You may be thinking, "I thought there were 12 disciples," but remember that now that Judas has left, they are one fewer in number. So, here they are called "the 11." We don't know exactly when their trip to Galilee took place, but more than likely it was at least eight days after Jesus' resurrection and that during that time span, they had already seen the resurrected Jesus 2 or 3 times.

They went "**to the mountain which Jesus had designated**" – We don't know which mountain they met on, but evidently the disciples did because Jesus had set up this arrangement with them before His death. Flip back a few pages to Matt. 26:31-32:

**Matthew 26:31-32** Then Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away because of Me this night, for it is written, 'I WILL STRIKE DOWN THE SHEPHERD, AND THE SHEEP OF THE FLOCK SHALL BE SCATTERED.'<sup>32</sup> "But after I have been raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee."

Alright, turn back to chapter 28. Looking now at v.17, what was their response to Jesus when they saw Him?

V.17 tells us "**When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some were doubtful**" – the first response we see is one of worship. That would be the natural response to seeing the One who had meant so much to them, who had conquered death and was now alive forevermore. Jesus wasn't dead. His promises and plans were not void. He was stronger than death, and everything had happened just as He said it would.

But notice the other response we see in v.17: "**but some were doubtful/hesitant**" – It's possible that some of the disciples could have still been doubting, but at this point, that seems somewhat unlikely. Jesus has already appeared to Thomas and shown him His hands and side, and all of the disciples had seen the risen Jesus several times. Because of this, many commentators believe that this doubting group represents a different group than the 11 disciples. But if the doubters didn't come from among the disciples, where did they come from? A possible solution may come from what Paul says in 1 Cor. 15:6. There, he says that Jesus "appeared to more than 500 brethren at one time." Could these 500 eyewitnesses have accompanied the 11 disciples to Galilee to see Jesus? It's certainly possible, and since this occurred at least eight days after His resurrection, there would have been time to organize this kind of a trip. It may be that some of them, who had never laid eyes on the risen Jesus before, found it hard to believe that this was really Him risen from the dead.

Jesus had called this meeting because He had some very important instructions to give them. Look at what He says, beginning in v.18:

v.18 <sup>18</sup> **And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.**

V.18 records Jesus' basis for the command to make disciples. To see this, look at the opening words of v.19: "Go therefore and make disciples." Why should they go and make disciples? The word "therefore" points back at v.18. V.18 is the reason they were to obey v.19.

But what, specifically, was that reason? The reason they were to make disciples was Christ's authority. Notice what He says: "**All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth**" – IOW, Jesus was saying that God had given Him complete sovereignty over everything, both heaven and earth.

Why would Jesus have told them that? What difference did that make for the command He was about to give? Here's the answer:

If Christ really has *all authority* over everything, then this should give them great confidence as they take on this task. If the one commissioning you has all authority, you wouldn't be inclined to worry about the obstacles you run into. You wouldn't tend to fret about the challenges you face. You would know that the mission would succeed because Christ's power is guaranteeing its success.

And by the way, read the book of Acts to see His power on display through the work of the Spirit, sending angels to open prison doors, allowing Paul to survive a stoning, a shipwreck, and a snakebite, causing the apostles to perform signs and wonders, empowering them to heal the sick and raise the dead, and the greatest wonder of all, converting lost, rebellious, intractable hearts to repentance and wholehearted faith in His blood shed for their sins. So, is Jesus up to the task of making sure His gospel goes forth with power in this world? Absolutely. Is He able to save lost sinners from their sinful condition and give them life? Without question. Therefore, because Jesus is Lord of heaven and earth, because He can accomplish whatever He chooses, His followers are to serve Him in confidence and boldness.

Folks, this should give you and me great confidence as we are trying to make disciples. What do we do when we hit an impasse, when we're at a loss for how to move forward? We pray, knowing that Jesus is able to make a way through any situation, if it be His will. And what do we do when we encounter stubborn hearts hostile toward the gospel? Were it up to you and me to make them believe, we'd quit at the first sign of resistance. But Jesus' authority is precisely the reason we can have confidence and keep sharing the gospel. It's not up to you and me to make them believe. It's up to God, and He's more than equal to the task. Jesus' power over all things gives us this confidence.

Let me share with you how I've seen this play out right here in Wake Forest. There is a children's ministry, headed up by a wonderful couple named Monty and Katharine Ray, that meets over at the Massey Housing area on Saturdays. In order for that ministry to operate effectively, evangelizing children and teaching them the Bible, the volunteers need access to the community center. At several times along the way, it's looked like their access was going to be revoked because the people overseeing the use of the community center were hostile toward the gospel and anyone trying to share it. But each time, the team of Massey missionaries would stop and pray to the sovereign God who has authority over all things, and He would grant them favor and make a way for them to use the building week in and week out. To my knowledge, they never had to cancel a week of the ministry for that reason.

But you know, the challenge of getting access to the building was nothing compared to the challenge of reaching a community hardened toward the gospel. Our church did a VBS there several years back, and we learned that many children there come from broken homes and are angry and rebellious against anyone in authority. How would we ever see any fruit from a ministry toward hardened hearts like that? The answer is Jesus, who has authority over everything and can subdue the rebellious heart and bring it to repentance. I'm happy to report that Monty called me several months back and told me that his church was baptizing 6 children and 2 adults from the Massey area, who had come to faith in Christ and were serious about following Him as a disciple.

And do you know what he told me about one of the worst kids out there, who had trusted Christ not long before I left? He said, "I don't know what's gotten into him, but he's sharing Jesus with everyone around here these days." I know what got into him. The Spirit of God. The power of the gospel, radically transforming a kid from a broken home, who had no interest in the things of God, and making him a passionate soul-

winner. Folks, that's what our God can do, and that's the confidence we go in when we set out to make disciples in His name.

Based on this authority, this power to advance His gospel through any hurdle, any obstacle, any difficulty, here's what Jesus commanded of His disciples, and what He commands of us:

v.19a <sup>19</sup> **"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations,**

Folks, do you know how you get to witness God's faithfulness to transform people through the gospel, like Monty and Katharine Ray have? Do you know how you get to die one day with hundreds of stories emblazoned in your mind of seeing God work? It's not by sitting on the sidelines and letting someone else do the work. It's by diving in, rolling up your sleeves, and doing it yourself.

And here's what you're commanded to do: **"make disciples of all the nations"** – This is the main verb and the main idea of Jesus' statement here. A few observations about disciple making, that is, leading others to become followers of Christ.

First of all, making disciples implies that you would proclaim the gospel to lost people, and by God's grace, they would respond in repentance and wholehearted faith in Christ. So, this step is presumed in everything that we'll say next. In fact, Luke records Jesus saying this to His disciples just before He ascends back up to heaven.

**Luke 24:46-47** and [Jesus] said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, <sup>47</sup> and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

The application for you here is that you need to be learning how to share the gospel with someone. You may object, "But I haven't memorized one of the evangelism plans yet. I'm afraid I can't be effective without that." Nonsense. You knew the gospel enough to be saved, didn't you? Someone explained to you your sinfulness, God's wrath against sin, Jesus Christ's divinity and humanity, His sinless life, His death as a substitute for sinners, His resurrection, and the offer of righteous standing before God if you repent of your sin and trust in Christ alone. If you know enough to be saved, you know enough to share with others.

Second, we are commanded to "make disciples," not to make converts. The "win-'em-and-leave-'em" strategy is not what Jesus had in mind. Folks, if you win someone to the Lord, your job isn't over; it's just begun. You have now become a discipler. You should now see to it that this baby Christian is plugged into a good church and taught the truths of Scripture, so that he or she grows into maturity in Christ. Making disciples is much harder work than winning converts, but that's what we're commanded to do.

Third, making disciples has an international focus. Christ's followers are to "go," and they are to disciple **"all the nations"** – this is a beautiful picture. All the nations does not mean all the nations nearby and most convenient to reach, or all the nations that speak the same language as we do, or that have the same skin color, or those that are most cultivated and like America. No, it means all nations. It means that when Jesus returns, there is no better place that He could find you than in a mud hut in Africa, or in a rice paddy in Southeast Asia, or in the streets of Calcutta sharing the gospel. It means that we should have a passion to see the nations worship God, for God is a God of the nations.

Can I tell you about one of my favorite church services that I have ever attended? Summer of 2006. Chicago, Illinois. A church there called Armitage Baptist Church. It wasn't the best sermon I'd ever heard, although it wasn't bad. It wasn't the best worship song selection I'd ever seen, although it was edifying. It was the people there. As Caroline and I looked around, we realized that only about 15% of the people in that room looked like us. There were African-American people, Asian people, Indian people, what looked like a mosaic of people from all different places around the world. No one sitting near us had the same skin color as us. It was a beautiful sight to behold. And those people loved one another and together they sang out passionately in praise of one common Savior. God's glory was on display that day as a God of the nations. It not only looked like a cross-section of Chicago; it was a cross-section of what heaven will look like.

In Scripture, God is very clear about His plan to bless the nations. In His covenant with Abraham God promised that through Abraham's seed (viz., Jesus) all the nations of the earth would be blessed. And it's no coincidence that Matthew begins his Gospel in the very first verse by calling Jesus "son of Abraham." In other words, Jesus is the fulfillment of this promise. Now, at the very end of Matthew's Gospel this same

Jesus is seen commanding His followers to carry the good news of the gospel to the nations so that they might experience the blessing of salvation. Jesus was the fulfillment of God's plan to bless the nations. The fourth observation today about making all the nations disciples of Jesus is that it implies something: it implies that they aren't "just fine" the way they are. Were Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, and all the other world religions legitimate paths to God, we wouldn't find a command here to make the nations followers of Christ. Folks, contrary to the prevailing notions of our culture, all roads don't lead to heaven. All world religions are not equal, so long as you believe them earnestly. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except by Me." And for those who would say that Christianity can be true, along with every other religion, please understand that Christianity, as Jesus defined it, did not leave this possibility open. Christianity will not allow itself to coexist with other religions because Jesus denied that there was any other path to get to God apart from Him. Christianity claims an exclusivity of salvation through Jesus Christ, and it is because we believe that men and women are lost and dying in their sins apart from Christ that we take the gospel to them. The exclusivity of salvation through Christ provides a powerful missionary motive. We cannot keep silent while sinners perish in their sins. We must tell them of the Savior. Finally, a point of application: although we've talked about making disciples of all the nations, we need to understand that this mandate should be applied equally to the folks across the street from us as it is to those halfway around the world. In other words, you and I are to be busy making disciples in the greater Triangle area, just as we are around the world. And folks, I don't know if you've noticed, but the nations are coming to us here in North Carolina.

Next, look at the rest of v.19 and the first part of v.20. If you want to know two characteristics of disciple-making, they are:

v.19b-20a **baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,**<sup>20</sup> **teaching them to observe all that I commanded you;**

So, here are the two characteristics of making disciples that go on your handout: baptizing them, teaching them to obey Christ's commands

First, notice that disciples should be baptized. In fact, although baptism is not necessary for salvation, the NT presents a consistent picture that Christ's disciples will be baptized. Baptism displays outwardly for all to see what has happened inwardly in you, namely, that you have died with Christ, been buried with Him, and been raised with Him to walk in newness of life. It is your public profession to the world that you are a follower of Christ and that you have died to your former manner of life.

Notice as well that this is a Christian baptism. It is "**in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.**" Isn't it interesting that the word "name" is singular, but all three Persons of the Godhead are mentioned individually? Do you think we could be onto something there in terms of our doctrine of the Trinity?

But baptism is not the end of our Christian journey; in fact, it is only the beginning. Next, disciples need to be taught to obey Christ's commands (v.20): "**teaching them to observe all that I commanded you.**" A few observations about this phrase:

First, it means that disciples must be taught the content of the Bible. Nowhere else do we find out what Jesus has commanded from His followers. God may work in spite of biblical ignorance sometimes, but He does not desire that you remain ignorant of His will for you. And His will is sufficiently revealed for you in the Scriptures. Read it, learn it, and teach it to others.

Second, the text does not say, "teaching them all that I commanded you." It says, "teaching them to observe all that I commanded you." Jesus does not simply want His followers to know all of His commands. He doesn't simply want you to be more informed. He wants the truths that you learn to transform your lives. I worry that all too often we as Christians know lots about what Jesus wants from us; the problem is we just don't do it. We don't obey. But as John says, "By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we are keeping His commandments." Jesus isn't interested in how many of His commands you can rattle off. He's interested in how many you're keeping.

Third, notice that the text says, "teaching them to observe all that I commanded you." Notice that Jesus isn't interested in you and me obeying part of what He commanded us. He isn't interested in any type of

discipleship in which you and I pick which commands to obey and disregard the rest. That option isn't open to us if we're to be true disciples. Instead, everything He commanded we are to obey. That's part of being a disciple. His commands are right and fair and good for us simply because He commanded them. He doesn't have to poll you and me first. He's the sovereign Lord of the universe, and what He says, goes.

Finally, an observation I couldn't pass up as a good Baptist. Notice that all who are disciples must be not only baptized but taught. Both are to be true of any disciple. The reason we don't baptize infants, among others, is that they can't be taught yet. In fact, they can't even understand the gospel message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. So, infants are not proper subjects for baptism.

Jesus has just given a monumental command to His followers. Notice at the end of v.20 that He closes with an assurance for them as they set out to do this work:

v.20b **and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."**

Here is the promise for making disciples: Christ's presence.

Notice that the disciples are not left simply to do the best they can on their own in light of what they have learned. Jesus promises to be their companion as they go throughout life, and especially as they are busy making disciples. Christ's spiritual presence goes with us wherever we go. In fact, the word "I" is emphatic in the Greek: "And behold, I with you am all the days..."

Isn't it amazing that the same Jesus that Matthew describes as "Emmanuel, God with us" in chapter 1 is the same Jesus who promises to be God with us to the end of the age?

Jesus is with us as we carry out this task "**always**," or lit. "all the days" – "days of strength and of weakness, days of success and of failure, of joy and of sorrow, of youth and of age, days of life and day of death—all days" He is with us (Broadus).

He is with us even "**until the end/completion of the age**" that is, the time now between Messiah's first coming and His second coming. Jesus wants you to know that during this time He has not abandoned you; He is with you the days.

And one day, the one who has authority over all things will bring this age to a close and usher in a new one in which He will reign. In the meantime, however, we live between the commission and the consummation. And how should we live? Jesus desires that you and I would spend our lives obeying this command, relying on in His power and comforted by His presence. This is what a healthy church does. It takes seriously the command of our Savior, and takes His agenda as our own. And Christ's agenda is the glory of God through the salvation of the nations. This morning I close with a final question: Is that yours?