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# He Sent His Disciples

Matthew 28:16-20

*Tim Nixon*

This morning we wrap up our study in Matthew. It is very fitting that in our short text we see, not only the culmination of the book, but we are reminded of the theme we have been seeing week in and week out for a year now.

This text is known as the Great Commission. Or as I like to call it, the Great Co-Mission.

But there is much more to it than that. For this text also reinforces the theme, or as some call it, the melodic line of Matthew.

What does that mean? It simply means what the book is all about.

Why is that important? Because when we know what the book is about, we read and study it with that in mind. Keep in mind that our goal is always to grasp the meaning of the text God has intended.

We do not create meaning out of a text; rather we seek to find the meaning that is already there.

This is part of the interpretive journey we take as we read our Bible's.

And we have been working through this theme and reminding ourselves of it for a long time now.

It would be easy for me to skip all this theme and melodic line stuff and dig write into the Great Commission, but Matthew is reminding us of that theme in the midst of the Great Commission. So, we need to pause and take the time to see why.

What is the connection?

In Matthew we see that melodic line, or theme most clearly in the beginning and now at the end. Remember the beginning of the book:

- In the very beginning, in Matthew chapter 1 and verse one we read, "the book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham."
- Jesus - the Christ, the Messiah, the anointed one. "Christ" is His title (not his last name), signifying Jesus was sent from God to be a *King* and Deliverer.
- And Son of David - David, of course, was the great king of Israel. He was the one through whom the great promise was made - the promise of the everlasting *kingdom*.
- And so, Jesus is the King, the Son of David, but also, he is the Son of Abraham. Abraham was the non-Israelite Father of the Nation. That is what Romans 4 tells us - that Abraham was not an Israelite until he became one.

- Why is Abraham important? Because through Abraham *all the nations will be blessed* (Genesis 12). That is us!
- And so, the point of these 3 persons and these 3 promises – as we have seen fleshed out in Matthew’s gospel is:

**Jesus will be that eternal king who reigns over that eternal kingdom which will be a blessing to all the peoples of the earth.**

And so, Jesus is King – Authority

And Jesus is king of the Jews and the Gentiles – Nations

And the third is a necessary admonition which follows: Therefore, this King Jesus is to be worshiped by all. We will call this allegiance.

And we even see this allegiance early on when non-Jews travel from the East with their gifts to worship King Jesus.

Now let’s look at our text this morning and see how the end confirms the beginning. Listen with me how that theme culminates in this text.

**Read with me verses 16-20 of chapter 28.**

Look at the “all” phrases. All Authority, All Nations, All that he has commanded (Allegiance).

Let’s walk through this together.

Jesus had directed the disciples to meet him on a mountain. And when they saw him they worshiped him but some hesitated or doubted. This is the same word used back in chapter 14 when Peter was walking on the water and began to sink and Jesus replied to Peter, “Oh you of little faith, why have you doubted?” It is the idea of hesitancy. Peter saw the waves and hesitated. And so, in the same way they worshiped him but some hesitated to do so.

Why? My guess is that they weren’t quite sure this was really Jesus. And isn’t it interesting how Jesus responded to the hesitancy and the worship in verses 18 through 20. He does so, in Matthew’s account, by reminding them of who he is and why he came. This is what we have been looking at for a year now week in and week out. The focus of Matthew’s account, the takeaway this entire gospel, Matthew now reiterates to them and to us.

Verse 18. All authority on heaven and earth has been given to me. I think we read this so often that it has become so familiar to us that we do not understand the gravity of what Jesus has just said. No human being in their right mind would say this. I remember years and years ago as a new believer reading a book titled, “Evidence That Demands a Verdict” where the author had I believe, borrowed from CS Lewis, and made the claim that Jesus Christ was either a liar, a lunatic, or Lord.

Think of Jesus claims. He is the son of David, the son of Abraham, the Son of Man, He will rule an eternal kingdom, he will be crucified and raised again on the third day, he instituted the Lord’s table, we baptize in his name, he claimed that if we love him we will keep his commandments.

That is who is making this statement. And Matthew has spent this entire gospel trying to convince us that Jesus the Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham, the Son of Man, is neither a liar nor a lunatic. And Matthew is putting his stamp on it right now and making it very clear that Jesus is Lord.

Verse 19. All Nations. Jesus Christ is commanding his followers to take the gospel to and make disciples of all nations. Christianity may have started in the Middle East, but it has spread to the nations. The largest population of Christians is not in the Middle East. No, it is in Africa, Latin America, and Asia.

Jesus is King of the Jews. Matthew has made that point both directly, and indirectly.

But Matthew has also shown us that Jesus is also king of the nations. He will proclaim justice to the Gentiles and in his name the Gentiles will hope (Matthew 12:18).

One commentator reminds us of what we heard just three weeks ago at Jesus crucifixion,

Above his head was written, this is Jesus King of the Jews. And it was written in Aramaic Latin and Greek, the languages of that day and that region. Today that label still exists but it says Jesus is King of the Jews and the King of the Gentiles. And it is written in English, German, French, Spanish, Romanian, Hindi, Mandarin, Japanese, Portuguese, and nearly every imaginable language. When Jesus died on the cross and the curtain was torn, access was granted to all, not simply Jews. The wall of hostility between Jews and Gentiles has been torn down. Now, salvation is available to all who believe.<sup>1</sup>

Remember the Gentile soldiers who were saved as the earth shook as Jesus gave up his spirit on the cross.

So, while the gospel is *exclusive, exclusively about Jesus*, Paul reminds us in Romans chapter 1 that it is also *inclusive*, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."

And Jesus requires all allegiance. Isn't that what discipleship is all about? Haven't we seen this over and over in Matthew, the call to discipleship? Think of Jesus own calls to discipleship:

- follow me
- take up your cross
- teach them to observe all I have commanded you
- many are called but few are chosen
- choosing Jesus over money
- losing your life for Jesus' sake
- Whoever loves father or mother more than me – that is allegiance.

Following Jesus – this is allegiance.

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<sup>1</sup> Doug O'Donnell, Sermon: "The Melodic Line of Matthew"

Verse 20. We are to observe ALL that Jesus commanded. This is not the Erasable Bible.

We trust and obey, for there's no other way...

We believe the Word in an obeying way.

We believe and Bow!

### **How can we do it?**

Jesus may have all authority, over all nations, demanding, and deserving all allegiance, but the world still hates him. So how can we teach them, in fact, how can we observe all that he has commanded?

It is because he is with us. He is Emanuel, God with us. And he is not only with us, but also in us. One author writes:

“It is easy enough to say that when we live our lives by Jesus values, evangelism will come naturally. But how do we live our lives like Jesus? It seems too much to ask. Jesus, after all, was God incarnate. I am just a human being - frail, frightened and essentially unable to live up to this ideal.

Of course, you alone cannot live up to this ideal. Neither can I. But God knows this, and he is not left us to go it alone. Jesus is with us and by the power of the Holy Spirit he calls, equips and motivates us for this commission. This is a bit of good news. The presence of Christ brings us his power and ability to use our limited resources in his limitless way.”<sup>2</sup>

The focus would be on the Resurrected and Reigning king's commissional sending. With all we have learned through Matthew, what now? Make disciples of all people groups through the means Jesus commands beginning with the Apostles and then the church. Where disciple-making people go, Jesus is present with them. Where disciple-making people go, the King's rule is being expanded. Why? Because disciples are people, through the whole book, who have believed and bowed, who have taken up the cross in accepting the gospel and acclaiming Jesus as Lord. This text is what the whole book has prepared us for.

Evangelism is under attack today. It is not open warfare, but an insidious pressure against true, Biblical evangelism. It is under attack on several fronts.

### **Decisional regeneration**

Assumes that an affirmative decision for Christ results in the person being born again. Places the point of initiative for regeneration in the will of man.

### **Easy believism**

Denial of the Lordship of Christ at conversion. Makes simple belief the only criteria for salvation. Turns repentance into an act of the mind.

### **Evangelical professionalism**

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<sup>2</sup> Rebecca Pippert, *Out of the Saltshaker and Into the World*, IVP, page 103.

Transfers the responsibility to a professional class within Christianity, usually the clergy, evangelists or missionaries. Often, spiritual enablements are used to justify this reasoning.

### **Theological escapism**

The use of a theological truth to avoid a Biblical responsibility. Often encountered in Sovereign Grace circles and is called Hyper-Calvinism.

### **Redemptive universalism**

A loss of the need for the Word of God in faith. The idea that no matter what a man believes, if a part of what he believes is true and leads him to a worship of something which is true to God, God accepts this on the basis of Christ's death.

The end result is all the same; people are not evangelizing. They may be talking about heaven, or making suggestions about God, or calling on people to try God or to make a decision for God, or even presenting a god who is here to solve all their problems.

Our own philosophy of missions, in the area of evangelism, is based, not on the idea of people making decisions for Jesus, but on discipleship. The goal of our missions to the nations is oriented, "To make disciples and multiply churches among all people groups..."

This is why Pastor Tim Rech, Pastor Russ, and I do missions and outreach the way we do. Making disciples is everything.

"The great commission is a command to bring unbelievers throughout the world to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. The true convert is a disciple, a person who has accepted and submitted himself to Jesus Christ, and all that may mean or demand. The truly converted person is filled with the Holy Spirit and given a new nature that yearns to obey and worship the Lord who has saved him. Even when he is disobedient, he knows he is living against the grain of his new nature, which is to honor and please the Lord. He loves righteousness and hates sin, including his own.

Jesus supreme command, therefore, is for those who are his disciples to become his instruments for making disciples of all nations. Jesus own earthly ministry was to make disciples for himself, and that is the ministry of his people. Those who truly follow Jesus Christ become "fishers of men". The mission of the early church was to make disciples, and that is still Christ's mission for his church."<sup>3</sup>

It is so much more than just seeing people saved.

It has always been God's desire to reach lost people and bring them into relationship with him. This is the point of 1 Timothy 2:3-4, "This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

One commentator writing on this morning's text says,

"And now God has a remnant of people gathered on that hillside in Galilee, and all those who will come from their ministry, including us, to whom this command is

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<sup>3</sup> John MacArthur, "Matthew, The Coming of the King", page 153.

given to reach the world. We are reminded that the statement, make disciples, is the heart of our calling. That is what we are in the world to do that. That teaching, and preaching, and worship, fellowship, all of these things, which we cherish and hold dear to us, our only means to an end. They are only elements of preparation for the real task, which is evangelizing the world, which is reaching the lost for Christ.

The tragedy of the Church of Jesus Christ is that so many people have lost sight of that commission, and have settled for a comfortable, self-indulgent kind of Christianity, that is little more than an expensive social club membership.

That is not God's intention."<sup>4</sup>

I was so excited and humbled a few years ago when we took an offering to build a church in Romania and within a couple weeks had received enough money to complete the entire project from the ground up. This is one way in which brothers and sisters in Christ came together for their brothers and sisters halfway around the world. But the most exciting part is that in that area of Romania, marginalized men and women are being saved and disciples are being developed because of that work.

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## Reflect and Respond

Matthew understands that his life and ministry are to magnify Christ. He is living his life and pouring himself out in ministry so that Christ will be seen as supreme and preeminent. Have we come to where this is an inward reality in our own lives?

- Do we truly grasp our utter dependence on God for absolutely everything?
- Does God's purpose for our lives so grip us that we will remain unshaken in the face of all sorts of difficulty?
- Are we so satisfied with Jesus that we find in Him the fullness of our joy?
- Is sacrificial living the natural outcome of our way of thinking?

The first step in becoming a disciple is your saving faith. But what does saving faith look like?

- It is coming to Jesus as Savior.
- It is bowing to Jesus as sovereign with all allegiance.
- It is believing Jesus' words that he speaks with all authority.
- It is obeying Jesus' commands.

Many here today are facing hardships, some are desperate. I do not know if your desperate situation is sickness or handicaps or the piling up of sin's consequences. But I do know this. There is only one place to go. And that is Jesus. Believe in Him and bow to Him - today.

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<sup>4</sup> John MacArthur, "The Making Disciples of All Nations, Part 2", June 1985