

Go Therefore

Matthew 28:11-20

Matthew concludes his gospel with the great commission, Jesus command to make disciples of the all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, teaching them to do everything He commanded. This is the mission of the church and therefore of every Christian.

Summary of the Text

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary are on their way to tell the disciples to meet Jesus in Galilee while some of the guard go into the city to report to the chief priests (v. 11). The priests consult with the elders and give “much silver” to bribe the soldiers to lie and say the disciples stole the body while they slept (vv.12-13). They need to assure the guard that if Pilate hears about it they will bribe him too because sleeping on the job could get them executed. They take the money, and the rumor continues to the time Matthew writes (v. 15). The eleven disciples go to the mountain in Galilee where they find and worship Jesus, even as some doubt (v. 16). Then Jesus delivers the great commission, the marching orders of the Christian Church. He says all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Him, therefore they are to disciple the nations which consists of baptizing in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and teaching them all things He commanded; He’ll be with them always, even to the end of the age (vv. 17-20).

Warrant for the Mission

Jesus does not say “Go make disciples.” He says “Go *therefore* and make disciples” which is predicated on the fact that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Him (v. 18). Imagine yourself looking at the risen Christ, wondering what in the world is going on and what would happen next. Jesus had fed the 5000, raised Lazarus, stilled the storm, healed lepers, called tax collectors to repentance, and then was betrayed by one thieving disciple and got crucified between two criminals. Is this plan for every follower of Jesus? At the beginning of His ministry, Jesus went into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil who offered Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory if He would fall down and worship him. Jesus didn’t deny the devil could offer this gift, but refused it, saying “You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve” (Matt. 4:10; cf. Dt. 6:13). He walked away from the power, glory, and allegiance of the whole world because He didn’t want it at the cost of sinning against His Father. But after His resurrection He has all authority in heaven on earth—to do what? To save sinners. Having died for His people, He is both just and the justifier of those who have faith (Rom. 3:26). The gospel declares the universal authority of Jesus Christ. People don’t make Jesus Lord of their life; He is Lord and we have the opportunity to receive His offer of mercy, forgiveness, cleansing, and adoption. This is why the apostles preached boldly and called men to repent and believe (Acts 2:36-39; 4:13, 29, 31; 5:42; 13:46; 14:13). The gospel must be preached on Christ’s authority, and not our personality, power of persuasion, or anything else. We therefore go.

Scope of the Mission

There’s a string of *alls* in the great commission: all authority in heaven and earth (all places) given to Christ, so we therefore go to disciple all (not “of all” or “from all”) the nations, teaching them to do all things He commanded, and He is with them always (vv. 18-20). When the high priest Caiaphas demanded that Jesus admit if He is the Christ, the Son of God, Jesus said yes, and “you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the power, and coming on the clouds of heaven”, a quote from Daniel 7:13 about the Son of Man coming to the Ancient of days (Matt. 26:64). The next verse in Daniel says “Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His

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dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed.” Jesus is not inventing anything here, but drawing on all the promises and prophecies of the Messiah’s kingdom: He will be given the nations for His inheritance and the ends of the earth for His possession (Ps. 2:8); all ends of the world will turn to the LORD and the families of the nations worship before Him (Ps. 22:27); He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth (Ps. 72:8); the Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising (Is. 60:3; cf. Hab. 2:14; Is. 11:9). It’s true that the way is narrow and that few from Jesus’ own nation at the time would find it (Matt. 7:13-14). But while these “sons of the kingdom will be cast out”, many Gentiles from east and west would come and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 8:11). When “the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains...all nations shall flow to it” (Is. 2:2). Jesus has come in power back from the dead (cf. Rom. 1:4), been given all authority, and is commissioning His church to disciple all the nations.

Recipients of the Mission

One of the reasons we lack confidence in the strength of Christ’s mission is because we look at ourselves and our doubts—just like the apostles (v. 17). Here we have eleven guys who fled in despair and had to be informed about what happened by Mary and Mary, and they are going to disciple the nations? Like many times before, the disciples doubt, which does not mean they totally disbelieve, just that they lack confidence. Apparently, this is no threat to the mission. You don’t have to have perfect faith or wisdom to be part of the mission, which is good because no one does. We should ask questions, address our doubts, and grow in faith like the apostles did. We’ve seen how crucial all the followers of Jesus have been in the crucifixion and resurrection account. Christ gives us “apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry” (Eph 4:11-12). The whole body and every part in it plays a vital role in the mission—the church is the mission.

Content of the Mission

The task is to make disciples of all the nations, which is done by baptizing and teaching. Baptismal fonts are historically placed near the door of the church because baptism objectively marks someone as a Christian. It’s possible to be baptized and not believe, but this is not God’s intention. The bar for baptizing is low: faith (trust) in Jesus. Then the church must teach followers of Christ to do all He commanded (cf. Jn. 14:15).

Opposition to the Mission

Before the apostles even hear about the resurrection, the chief priests receive the report about “all the things that had happened” (v. 11). They bought Judas off, they bought the soldiers off, and were ready to buy Pilate off. But did it work to suppress the mission? Three hundred years later Augustine comments, “What do we see, which they do not see? The church throughout all nations. What do we not see, which they saw? Christ present in the flesh. As they saw him, and believed concerning the body, so do we see the body; let us believe considering the head. Let what we have respectively seen help us. The side of Christ help them to believe the future of the church; the side of the church helps us to believe that Christ has risen.” He is still with us.