

Sent by Christ

Matthew 28:16-20

We've considered why we worship the way we do, how the Lord renews us in His covenant through the ministry of word and sacrament on the Lord's Day. Worship is an end, if not *the* end, in itself: "One thing I have desired of the Lord, that will I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple" (Ps. 27:4). But we are sent out from this service to transform all of life, so we consider what we are sent to do and some specific impacts of worship.

Summary of the Text

After the resurrection and before His ascension, Jesus tells the eleven disciples to meet with Him on a mountain. They worship Him there, but some doubt (vv. 16-17). He delivers the great commission which begins with an indicative statement that lays the foundation for the mission: "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (v. 18). Did He not have all authority before being crucified? Every Christian would say that by nature of His divinity He absolutely did. But He had not yet saved the world, conquering sin and death. He has authority now as the risen savior to send them as emissaries with His authority—all of it in heaven and earth: "Go therefore, disciple all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen" (vv. 19-20). Jesus lifted His hands and blessed the disciples before He ascended into heaven, and the great commission is part of that blessing (Lk. 24:50-51). It's not a task that causes despair, as if He tells them to disciple the nations and could sarcastically add, "And good luck with *that!*" Quite the opposite: "Behold, I send the promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high" (Lk. 24:49). The disciples wondered if Jesus would restore the kingdom to Israel, and His answer was that they'd receive the Holy Spirit and be witnesses to Him in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the end of the earth (Acts 1:6-8). Then Messiah was always believed to bring the worldwide success of God's kingdom (Ps. 72:8-11). We see the success of the gospel through the sacrificial witness of the church in Acts and since then for twenty centuries. When the church worships faithfully, the word of God flourishes in the world.

Impacts of Worship

Because we worship the God of all creation, everything we do in His presence has relevance for all of life. But we can make some direct connections of how we are to imitate and implement this service.

Call – God calls each of us to worship in the congregation, and each to go serve Him faithfully in our daily vocations and callings. We have abilities, opportunities, and desires that result in work: "And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance" (Col. 3:23-24). He blesses the work of our hands and calls us to begin the week worshipping Him in Spirit and in truth (Jn. 4:23).

Confession – Just as we pray for daily bread, we confess our sins daily and forgive others lest our heavenly Father not forgive us (Matt. 6:12, 14-15). It's impossible to keep short accounts with God and be in thrall of pride or despair. We see in worship how honest and simple confession works. Name the sin the way the Lord does, seek His forgiveness, receive it, and walk away. Confess your sins to your neighbor, starting with those you live with. The promise of forgiveness is to not bring sin up again to God,

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yourself, or your neighbor in order to accuse, which is what bitterness does. Corrie Ten Boom: “Forgiveness is setting the prisoner free, only to find out that the prisoner was me.” Forgiveness is a transaction where it is sought and granted, but even if someone is not asking, you can have it packaged and ready to go. This is how you live at peace with God and man, rather than feeding a root of bitterness ready to shoot up (Heb. 12:15). The result of being forgiven much is loving much—knowing, experiencing, and extending the great love of God to others (Lk. 7:47).

Consecration – As we hear and act on the word of God, it’s clear that Scripture is delightful and relevant for all of life. We need to be steeped in and nourished by it, reading it simply and regularly (1 Pet. 2:2-3; 1 Tim. 3:16-17). Christ consecrates you to live a holy life, “created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10). People talk about “Sunday Christians” who speak and act differently at church than elsewhere. We want to live in light of what we say and do here, living out the comprehensive claims of Christ.

Communion – Christ feeds us here and offers us true fellowship, peace, and satisfaction. We saw the conflicts and divisions among the Christians in Corinth that became obvious at the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor. 11:19-21). It’s hard to eat with people you are unhappy with, so communion forces us to get right with God and with one another, which is one reason Christians don’t take it more often. It’s inconsistent to still be clinging to sin and come to the table, and it’s inconsistent to be sinfully angry with your brother or sister and come to this table. Rather than keep away from the table, get right with Him and them, and come. Eat the bread and drink wine resolved to go make it right. If you are a person who doesn’t really take personal responsibility for your own sins, let love cover a multitude of others’ sins, and has a string of broken relationships in which the common factor is you, then let the Spirit convict and lead you to peace. The apostolic church received God’s hospitality at this table and imitated it: “So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:46-47). Sometimes it’s ambiguous whether Luke means they took communion or had dinner together because the one drives the other. Communing with God and His people here causes you to hunger to bless others as you have been blessed. Jesus says many will come from east and west to this table (Matt. 8:11).

The Greatness of the Great Commission

You can’t make the great commission any greater. Disciple all the nations, baptizing and teaching them everything. The vastness of the mission reveals how each believer plays a role, which is why we are all sent out at the end of the service with Christ’s benediction. We need the hope of the apostles, to believe in the finished work of Christ to save the world (Jn. 3:17). You are not working on a sinking ship or living your life in a waiting room. You’re sent by Christ to announce and live faithfully in His inaugurated kingdom because all authority in heaven and earth has been given to Him.