

**<sup>16</sup> Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. <sup>17</sup> And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. <sup>18</sup> And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."**

### Introduction

In Matthew 28.16-20, we have a shift from some women that saw the risen Lord to the apostle-disciples (**the eleven disciples**). In the big picture, the account of the women reconnects Jesus with the apostles who left Him and fled at the time of His arrest. Scattered like sheep, they fade out of the story. The apostles are not there at the trials, for the mocking, at the place of the skull, in the darkness, or at the tomb. Granted, Peter is curious regarding the trial of Jesus, but he goes on record emphatically denying the Lord three times. Although the eleven forsook Jesus, He never forsook them for a moment. He thus sent the women to them to tell of His resurrection and to meet Him in Galilee. Through these loyal women, the Lord brings resolution to the disconnection with the apostles. The appearance of the risen Jesus to some women is a section in the writer's flow of thought (27.55-28.15) that points like an arrow from these women to the apostles (28.16-20).

Today, let us follow that arrow that points to the apostles, their meeting with Christ in Galilee, and His great commission that closes the book of Matthew (**<sup>16</sup> Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. <sup>17</sup> And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. <sup>18</sup> And Jesus came and said to them...**). The title for this message is "The Commission of the Apostles by the Risen Jesus" and the outline is twofold: the statement of duty in the great commission and the encouragement to obedience in the great commission.

### 1A. The statement of duty in the great commission

The final paragraph in Matthew (28.16-20) is one of the most often quoted passages of Scripture. It is a classic text that puts a great mission in front of the church that is central in the new order of things secured by the work of Christ. We call it the great commission for many good reasons expressed in connection with the word "all" (18-20, **all authority...all nations...all...I commanded...always, to the end of the age** or *all the way to the end of the age*).

This greatness helps us understand the statement of duty that stands at the heart of this commission. In a word for an overview, the duty is multidimensional.

### 1B. Initial questions

To focus our thoughts, we can ask and answer some initial questions. How many imperatives (verbs of command) are present here (in 19-20)? If you are trying to answer me, you are most likely focusing on verse 19 and thinking that there are two: go and make. However, there is only one imperative (**make disciples, v. 19**).

What is the word "go" if not an imperative? It is a subordinate verb that depends on and "hangs with" the main verb, which is the imperative "to make disciples." Often, subordinate verbs like this one (go) are translated with an "ing" ending. That is the case with baptizing (v. 19) and teaching (v. 20). Now there is a sense in which you could think of four imperatives here: go, make, baptize, and teach. The dependent verbs pick up the force of the independent verb. However, if we translated that way, we would miss the core duty (**make disciples, v. 19**); the reader would not recognize its central place; the core would become blurry. We need to stress the fact of a single imperative and thus of a pointed duty.

What can we say about "go"? No one translates the first dependent verb literally: going. Rarely, a translator might reflect the dependency (that is, the "ing" quality) of "go" by the translation "having gone" (Young's literal translation) but no one opts for "going." Why is that the case? Simply put, they do this because *it stands alone* as a dependent verb *without leading*

*into a dependent clause.* “Baptizing them into...” and “teaching them to observe...” are dependent clauses that the dependent verbs introduce. Thus, the first verb, “going” has a blank after it. It is unusual and it makes sense to translate it in the imperative (go) because it depends on the imperative main verb and because “going, make disciples” has an odd ring to it. By contrast, “go” suggests something like, move, start, or begin as in “begin your work, make disciples.”

## 2B. Verb relationships

Bear with me with things because the interpretation of this classic text rests on the relationship between the main verb (make disciples) and the three subordinate verbs (going, baptizing, and teaching). We can illustrate this relationship helpfully by thinking of a three-dimensional object. Picture a cube turned slightly so we can see three sides. On each side, we can write a word ending with “ing” (going, baptizing, and teaching). Now, what label might we give to the entire cube? What might we write above or below the entire cube? Yes, the label comes from the imperative; it is the “make disciples” cube.

What does this show us? It shows that going, baptizing, and teaching are simply different ways of viewing the same thing. Each dependent verb gives us a distinct perspective regarding the command to make disciples. Thus, and this is the important point, the details that follow the verbs fill each other out and together they reveal, explain, and define the duty of the great commission.

## 3B. Filling in the blank

The fact of distinct perspectives here means that all the details can be front loaded. That is, we have a way to fill in the blank that comes after the get going verb.

### 1) The elephant in the room

Surprisingly, the final words of Christ to His disciples make no mention *per se* of the gospel. The single imperative commands the making of disciples, which must involve preaching the gospel. Gospel proclamation is in the air here; it is implicit in the training of the apostles to preach the coming of the kingdom. Gospel proclamation is the elephant in the room regarding this text. Going thus must include preaching; it must involve gospel proclamation.

### 2) The defining phrases

When we begin with the duty of proclamation then the phrases in 19-20a define the essence of going. Going involves gospel proclamation to the nations that calls for a commitment to discipleship and explains the requirement of baptism in relation to divine authority, the trinity as a coming under the authority of God, and the commandments of Christ that unpack life under the authority of the triune God. The command is to make disciples by preaching, teaching, and proclaiming three basic things:

Baptism (into the new covenant community, as prepared for by John, Mat. 3)

Trinity (revealed by redemptive deed and implied all through Christ’s teaching)

Commandment keeping (per the teachings of Christ)

Therefore, we have insight into the nature of “going”; it is to the nations with gospel proclamation that includes teaching about baptism, the trinity, and commandment keeping.

### 3) The great teaching commission

Now we can fill out what it means to “make disciples” by going, baptizing, and teaching. Disciples are essentially learners. Bringing about and engaging in discipleship-learning is the hallmark of the great commission; it is truly the great teaching commission. The duty of preaching and learning from preaching governs how we should understand the three perspectives. The apostles make disciples by *going* to the nations *with gospel proclamation* that includes *teaching about baptism, the trinity, and commandment keeping*. They make disciples by baptizing people that repent (Lk. 24.47-48) in response to the preaching that includes baptism, the trinity, and commandment keeping. Moreover, they make disciples by teaching the baptized,

who commit to live under the authority of the triune God, how to live by all of Christ's commandments. The teaching has a "how to" orientation to it.

#### 4) The evangelize then teach mistake

To make a point: Jesus is not saying, "Make disciples then follow up with teaching of the commandments" (first evangelize then get them into the church for edification). Teaching about baptism, gospel washing, commitment, authority, the trinity, and the commandments is how the apostles make disciples. There is no restriction of teaching to some state of affairs that comes after evangelism and conversion. Gospel proclamation involves teaching and preaching (teaching-preaching or preaching-teaching). To make disciples includes both a beginning and a continuing. Discipling or making disciples (to reflect the impact of the "ing" verbs on the main verb) is the entire intertwined cube. If we view it from one angle, it is going, and from other angles, it is baptizing and teaching. Going interconnects with teaching and teaching interconnects with going, and both interconnect with baptizing. The apostles make disciples to the end of time from all nations by initiating and maintaining a process of gospel proclamation that involves preaching and listening to preaching (teaching and learning).

### 2A. The encouragement to obedience in the great commission

There are two encouragements from Jesus that come like slices of bread on each side of the core of the commission. They are His authority and His promise.

#### 1B. The authority of Jesus

Matthew's account reveals our risen Lord as Sabbath king. We must read His appearances in context. When we say that His resurrection appearances reveal Him as *Sabbath* king, we mean that they direct our thoughts to a distinct day, the day on which He began to rule in keeping with His office as Lord of the Sabbath (Mat. 12.8).

Consider how Sabbath kingship emerges in this context.

All that happens is forcefully presented as a continuation of the first Sunday (Mat. 28.1, "after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week," vs. 2, 6-7, "and...go tell his disciples he has risen from the dead, and...he is going before to Galilee," v. 8, "so they departed quickly," vs. 9-10 "Jesus met them...then Jesus said to them...tell my brothers to go to Galilee," v. 11, "while they were going," vs. 16-20, "Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee...and when they saw him they worshiped him...and Jesus came and said...go...make disciples of all nations...teaching them...and behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age").

The book closes with these words, "to the end of the age." There is no record of the ascension. The day after the Jewish Sabbath, the first day of the week or Sunday, is *the day that set the rest of history on earth in motion*. It is a special, unique, hallowed, and sanctified day. It is a day like the seventh day of creation week. It is a day that is comparable with the day of His second coming. Of what day in history can it be said that all the remaining days of history depend on it and flow out from it?

Not surprisingly then, NT writers speak of the resurrection of Christ as His exaltation to the throne on high. Thus Peter says that Jesus *became* Lord and Christ being exalted by God *when God raised Him from the dead* (Acts 2:36). Indeed, He was *already* Sabbath Lord when He *literally* ascended from the earth into the heavens to the right hand of the throne on high.

By "Sabbath king" I simply mean that Jesus is *head over all things*. Thus, it is in this capacity that God gave Him to the church" (Eph. 1.20-23, **he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places,** <sup>21</sup> **far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.** <sup>22</sup> **And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church,** <sup>23</sup> **which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.**). This is interesting language: "head over all...to the church." To be the head is to be the ruler, king, or sovereign. His is sovereign over all things and as such the Father of glory and the Spirit of wisdom (Eph. 1.17) gave Him to the church, "which is his body" (Eph. 1.23; Col. 1.18, "he is head of the body, the church).

Look more closely at Matthew 28:18. Jesus says, **all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me**. All authority over the created universe is His gift. He has it. It is His. And notably, it has been *given* to Him. But if He is God the Son who was with God in the beginning (Jn. 1.1-3) then He always possessed divine prerogatives. He always had all authority. That being the case we must still seek to do justice to the statement here that all authority was “given” to Him. God gave Him something that He did not have prior to that moment.

It is imperative that we view this passage in the context of the incarnation. It is the man born of Mary, God the incarnate son that suffered in the days of His humiliation, that learned obedience through suffering, and that was exalted by the resurrection to be Sabbath Lord. That He was made Sabbath Lord is indicated here in this passage by the absolutely universal authority that was given to Him: all authority in heaven and all authority on earth became His by God’s gift on resurrection Sunday.

The metaphor from the OT that comes to mind to illustrate the place that Christ came to occupy is the metaphor of the throne and footstool. After finishing the work of original creation in six days, the Creator sat down to rest with His feet elevated on a footstool (Isa. 66.1-2). He sat down on the heavens as His throne with the earth as the footstool under His feet. That is *the picture of universal sovereignty* that shows that when God completed the work of creation He then took up the work of sovereign rule over all that He created and made (absolutely comprehensive regarding the created order of things in distinction from the Creator). The seventh day was set apart because it was an inaugural day of God’s kingly rule. It became His holy day that man was to always remember and keep holy in honor to the Creator.

Likewise, after Jesus completed His work of redemption, He became both Lord and Christ by the resurrection (Acts 2.36). As a man He was appointed judge of all men by the resurrection (Acts 17.31), as the seed of David God appointed Him to be the Son of God by the powerful working of the Spirit in His resurrection (Rom. 1.3-4). In other words, on resurrection day Jesus entered into a royal rest. He ceased from the redemptive work of humiliation and began His redemptive rule of exaltation. He became universal sovereign on that unique day in history. Now, we are to keep His day holy in honor to the redeemer.

Encouragement to obey the great commission comes first from the Sabbath Lordship of Christ who gave the commission. On resurrection morning, Jesus received what had been promised to Him (Jn. 17:2; Mat. 11.27; Dan. 7.14). He became Head over all things, and in that capacity, God gave Him to the church.

Therefore, the apostles have the commission to go to the nations with the gospel, in effect, to build the church by baptizing and teaching. He does not tell them to go in gospel proclamation hoping to bring people into the church by baptism. He tells them to go and do it. In other words, because He is the builder of the church as universal sovereign, the church will arise from the nations. He simply says to go and do so *because He is the master builder* as sovereign God, ruler of nations, and Lord of history.

#### 2B. The promise of Jesus

He also encourages obedience by adding a promise. He promises to be with the apostles and us (the disciples then and now) to the end of the age. As head of the church, He is our friend. What we get is a wonderful, precious, marvelous, and awesome picture of the universal sovereign Lord Jesus as our covenant companion: **“And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age”** (v. 20).

His blood is the blood of the new covenant and covenant fulfillment comes through a process. In this process that moves steadfastly to the end of time, He abides with the apostles, with them and with us, in covenant fellowship as our constant companion. As the Lord made promise with Jacob with these words, **I will be with you wherever you go to fulfill all I have promised to you** (Gen. 28.15; cf. Hag. 1.13; Mat. 1.23; 18.20), likewise, He promises to be with them and us because it is to the end of the age. He promises: I will be with you to fulfill all I promised.

## Implications and applications

The nature of this text is such that we need to cover it in two parts. Today, we covered the commission of the apostles by the risen Jesus. That is part one; next week, in part two we will cover our commission in the great commission. Therefore, if you sense that more questions have been raised than have been answered, your sense of things is on target. There is much to consider to properly (wisely) move from the bearing of this commission on the apostles to its bearing on us.

Accordingly, what are some lessons (implications and applications) that *we need to learn* from this commission of the apostles (that we know goes beyond them to include us)? For application, we must begin with an accent on the commission of our Lord to the apostles before we expand on its bearing on us more fully.

### 1) The mission of the church is an apostolic mission

Jesus gave this commission to the apostles. Their work continues to the end of the age, so, it extends beyond them, beyond the apostolic age, and to us in the post-apostolic age. However, the point to take to heart is that the work of the apostles includes both the apostolic age and the post-apostolic age. We have to do justice to the fact that Christian mission (missionary work if you will) is first and foremost the mission of the apostles. It is that to the end of time.

### 2) The mission of the church is international

Jesus commissioned the apostles go to the nations and proclaim the gospel-good-news of His life, death, resurrection, entry into the new covenant community by baptism, and the call of commitment to live under the authority of the triune God by learning how to observe the commandments of Christ

Per prophetic perspective in Matthew 10 (the first great commission), the apostles preach to the Gentiles in the cities of Israel until the second coming. *They do not go to the Gentiles* (10.5); *at the same time they preach to the Gentiles* in the cities of Israel because the Israelites are “not the people of God”; they are Gentiles, figuratively speaking. This anticipates the shift to the nations in Matthew 28; it shows us that international mission includes Jews. Jewish people are absorbed into the nations of those who are not the people of God (shockingly, we may say with Hagner, *Matthew*, 887). As the gospel brings people of all nations into the new covenant community (Christ’s church), God brings a remnant of Jews along with them to make up the church, which is the new city of God composed of Jews and Gentiles alike without distinction.

### 3) The mission of the church is the mission of Christ

Those who receive you, Jesus said, receive me (Mat. 10.40).

This international work of the apostles to the end of the age is the work of Christ. Through them and us, *Jesus* builds His church. Therefore, the church has not failed so far and the church will not fail in the future to accomplish her mission. Of course, we must grant that the church fails in many ways all along the way. None of her failures (none of our failures) are light things, without significance, or without accountability. Nevertheless, the greatness of the great commission arises from the commissioner. Jesus said, I will build my church and the gates of hell will fall under siege by my church (Mat. 16.18). It is the redeemer of God’s elect that effectually builds the church through the apostles and us to the end of the age among all nations because God gave Him all authority in heaven and on earth (Mat. 28.18). His kingdom stretches from shore to shore for the universal sovereign and majestic Sabbath king is King of kings and Lord of lords. We are proof (every baptized community of disciples is proof) that this is Christ’s mission.

### 4) The mission of the church has its focus on disciple-making

Because the core of the commission is “make disciples, then it has its focus on preaching in a special way on a special day. He became Sabbath Lord on resurrection Sunday; the account presents His appearances to us with an accent on the day, as if He gave the great commission as an inaugural address on the day of His exaltation by the resurrection. His “inaugural address”

(per Matthew's way of presenting his material) is the great commission, the great resurrection proclamation that has at its center the duty of making disciples by gospel proclamation, which includes (in summary) the call to enter the new Israel as learner/disciples by baptism and the call to be "disciples in the making" by always learning how to live under the authority of Christ the Sabbath king by learning His commandments.

5) The mission of the church is a journey with a friend

Jesus is universal sovereign and loving friend. He is our traveling companion that makes our hearts burn within us (cf. Lk. 24). He is the greatest and best friend that anyone could possibly have. He is our very *life* now, day in and day out whatever we face. And He is our life forevermore for in Him we have spiritual, eternal, and resurrection life out in front of us. To get there (to glory and resurrection life), He will walk with us each step of the way.

**May we fall down before the majesty of Jesus, the seed of David who became Sabbath Lord, messianic king, and universal sovereign on resurrection Sunday to begin His rule of the nations now through gospel proclamation until what is not yet arrives and He receives us into the coming city of God, to Him be all glory, now and forevermore, amen.**