

# THE GREAT COMMISSION OF OUR KING JESUS

Matthew 28:16-20

Key Verse: 19a

**“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations...”**

We began our study of Matthew’s gospel in April of last year and studied 45 lessons. We will consider again the last words of Risen Jesus to his disciples. We call it the Great Commission. For anyone who is serious about following Jesus Christ the words are of paramount importance. To some listeners here, these words have been an inspiration and guide to your lives. To others, the words sound intimidating or burdensome. Still others may think, “This is something our church quotes a lot.” If we say we love Jesus and accept him as our King and Commander, may we have the ears and attitude to take his words to heart.

Look at verses 16-17. **“Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.”** In Matthew’s gospel there are two records appearances of the Risen Jesus. The first appearance was to the women who went to anoint Jesus’ dead body. Verse 17 retells this other appearance on a mountain in Galilee. We know from the other gospels that Risen Jesus already at least twice in Jerusalem to his disciples. Matthew brings us to this appearance in Galilee, where Jesus spent most of his time with his disciples. When they saw Risen Jesus, they worshiped him. Yes, Jesus who had walked and talked with them, Jesus who had performed miracles, Jesus who had died on the cross, was now in front of them, alive! They worshiped him. Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God. He is not dead. His body is not decaying in a grave on earth. He is alive forever more! For some, it was too good to be true. So they still had doubts.

At the end of Luke’s gospel and the beginning of Acts we learn about Jesus’ ascension into heaven. But Matthew focuses only on the last words that Risen Jesus gave to his disciples. They are recorded in verses 18-20. Let’s read them all together and then consider them in more detail:

Then Jesus came to them and said, **“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”**

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The Risen Jesus first said to them, **“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”** What does this mean? Who has all authority in heaven? Of course, the answer is God. There is no greater authority in heaven than God, because God reigns in heaven. But all authority has been given by God to Jesus Christ. Jesus obeyed God even to the point of death on the cross. Jesus perfectly loved God and people by dying for our sins. Philippians 2:9-11 expresses what happened as a result, **“Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”**

If all authority in heaven and on earth belongs to Jesus, what does this mean for us? For one thing, it means that he is the one we must obey and take our orders from. He is our Commander. He is the one we are ultimately accountable to. He is the Judge of our souls. It also means we don't have to be afraid of any earthly or spiritual authority, from man or the Devil. If Jesus is ultimately in charge, then nothing can happen unless he allows it or wills it.

Now let's look at the Great Commission in verses 19-20 in 3 parts: (1) make disciples, (2) go, baptize, teach, and (3) I'm with you always.

**First, make disciples of all nations.** **“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations...”** The main imperative verb in verses 19-20 is **“make disciples.”** The other verbs are participles or supporting verbs: go, baptizing and teaching. We'll look at that later. But first, **“make disciples of all nations.”**

To **‘make disciples’** one must first know what a disciple is. So what is a disciple? A disciple is a learner or a student. But student isn't a strong enough word in our modern context. Today it means someone who learns knowledge through a transfer of information from a teacher. So a student gains knowledge. A better Hebrew understanding is an apprentice. An apprentice learns how to do something by observing his craftsman. The apprentice learns a skill. Still this is not quite a disciple. In martial arts there is a master who has more knowledge, experience and skill who is qualified to train a new recruit, but who also tries to impart character to the student. Disciples of Jesus learn knowledge and skills but most of all character.

To make disciples of Jesus Christ one must first be a disciple of Jesus Christ. We can't teach something we don't already know or show something we don't already do ourselves.

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One author defined a disciple of Jesus as “a person-in-process who is eager to learn and apply the truths that Jesus Christ teaches him, which will result in ever-deepening commitments to a Christ-like lifestyle” (Christopher Adsit, “Personal Disciple-Making,” p.35).

Another author defines a disciple of Jesus as “one who moves closer to Jesus as a learner, follower and lover, together with other disciples” (Charles Davis, “Making Disciples Across Cultures,” p.32). By “lover” he meant that “we will love like Jesus loved” (p.40).

One time I was walking through St. Francis Hospital in Evanston with one of my young sons. He saw a statue of St. Francis of Assisi and said to me, “Dad, look it’s Jesus.” I replied, “No, it’s not Jesus, but close.” St. Francis reminded people of Jesus because he left the pursuit of money and devoted his life to follow Jesus.

So a disciple of Jesus Christ is a follower of Jesus Christ. I already mentioned at a disciple is an imitator. In order to become a great musician, one needs a great instructor, that is, a great example, a virtuoso.

The apostles of Jesus Christ were the greatest imitators of Jesus Christ. Take Apostle Paul as an example. Paul wanted to know nothing more than Jesus Christ, not only Jesus’ glories and victories, but also Jesus’ sufferings. So he wrote, **“I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead”** (Php 3:10-11). This is why Paul could tell other Christians, “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.” Can you say that? **“Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ.”** This should be our aim as disciples of Jesus. We should be living our Christian lives in a way that we would want others to imitate.

When people see us, do they see the image of Jesus? When our children see us, do they want to live their lives as followers of Jesus Christ? Do we live a lifestyle that we ourselves admire and really want to live up to? Do we aspire for the life of Jesus Christ - the heart, the mind and the words of Christ to dwell in us richly?

In the classic book by Walter Henrichsen, “Disciples Are Made—Not Born,” chapter 1 is titled: “The Kind of Person God Uses.” He describes “a faithful man” who can be a good disciple of Jesus. He mentions 9 things (pp.10-17):

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1. He (or she) has adopted as his objective in life the same objective God sets forth in the Scriptures.
2. He is willing to pay any price to have the will of God fulfilled in his life.
3. He has a love for the Word of God.
4. He has a servant heart.
5. He puts no confidence in the flesh.
6. He does not have an independent spirit.
7. He has a love for people.
8. He does not allow himself to become trapped in bitterness.
9. He has learned to discipline his life.

Let me share the author's ideas on 4 of these:

#2. (This one was most convicting to me this week.) The author wrote: "Let me ask you: Is there anything between you and God? Are there any little pet sins that you have been unwilling to confess and forsake? Any areas that you have not put under His control?" (p.11) This one was particularly convicting to me: to really submit a personal sin to God in this week; to really seek God's will. This helped me this week to be serious in my own life about being a disciple of Jesus.

#6. The author wrote: "A young man once told me, 'I will listen to what God has to say to me, but I will not learn from other people.' To have such an attitude is to live in self-deception. People are often God's instruments to communicate to other people. God is looking for faithful people who are willing to subjugate their own ideas for the sake of the team (p.15).

#8. "Many a person has become bitter because someone pointed out a fault in his life. He takes the attitude, 'Huh, who does he think he is, telling me about my sins? Why doesn't he take the beam out of his own eye?...As a young Christian, I remember hearing someone preach on this, and I jotted in the margin of my Bible, 'Bitterness comes as a result of real or supposed ill-treatment—it doesn't really matter which.' Somebody may really wrong you, or you can just think that somebody wronged you. In either case, if you are not careful, it can cause you to become bitter...The root of bitterness can come through a competitive spirit, a breakdown in communications between you and fellow Christians, or feeling that you have gotten a raw deal. I believe more disciples become ineffective in the Christian life because of a root of bitterness than because of any other sin. Faithful Christians guard their hearts well in this critical area" (pp.15-16).

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#9. This last point challenged the author the most. He was frightened to think that when he died God might say to him, “Let me show you what your life could have been like if only you had done what I asked, if only you had been faithful to me, if only you had disciplined your life and made it really count, as I wanted you to” (pp.16-17).

Christopher Adsit shares in his book how he had a life-changing realization in a graveyard one day. He looked at a dead man’s tombstone and calculated that the dead man had been dead more years than he had lived on earth. He wondered, “Was he in heaven or hell? What has he been doing? What can anyone do to get ready? Does anything we do here make a difference in eternity?” Then he remembered the words of a man of God who said: “Only 3 things are eternal: God, God’s word, and the souls of people.” That event reordered his life’s priorities. He began to dive into Bible study and prayer. Soon, he recognized that the most strategic use of his short life was to reproduce in others what the Holy Spirit and three men discipling him were producing in his life. He wrote: “I wanted to become an integral part of God’s grand design of bringing to spiritual maturity a people who would glorify Him and be at the forefront of His reconquest of planet Earth. I committed myself to discipling” (p.20).

**Second, going, baptizing and teaching.** Along with “make disciples” Jesus said to “go”, “baptize” and “teach.”

To go means to be intentional to reach out to others. This is contrary to our desire to “chill”, “take it easy,” “settle down,” or “have our own personal alone time.” To “go” we have to interact with other people. We need to start conversations. In a word, we must love people. We must care for people’s lives and souls.

Next Jesus said, “**baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.**” Baptism is an outward sign of an inward confession. It is a declaration to the world that “I am a follower of Jesus Christ.” And it is a joining in to the community of followers of Jesus Christ. So to baptize involves helping someone to make a personal, public confession of faith and commitment to Jesus Christ.

Finally, Jesus commanded, “**and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.**” Teaching obedience to Jesus Christ seems very lacking in the Christian church today. So much so, that the church looks too much like the world.

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So someone called this the Great Omission, since the church is largely omitting to teach obedience to Jesus' commands.

How can we teach obedience to everything that Jesus commanded? We start by obeying Jesus ourselves. Again, to make disciples, we must first strive to be a disciple. Then we can help others to follow Jesus too.

What commands must we teach? Jesus said "everything" that I have commanded you. In Matthew's gospel, Jesus gave 5 major teaching sections. Let's briefly review them and their relevance to discipleship. Michael J. Wilkins summarizes them as follows:

1. The Sermon on the Mount (Ch.5-7) which develops "kingdom-life disciples" or "radical, everyday discipleship lived in the presence and power of the kingdom of God within the everyday world."
2. The Mission Mandate (Ch.10) develops "mission-driven disciples" who "go out to share and live the gospel of the kingdom of God to an alien and often hostile world."
3. The Parabolic Disclosure (Ch.13) develops "clandestine-kingdom disciples" where "Jesus tests the hearts of the crowd to reveal whether the message of the kingdom has taken root and is producing fruit."
4. The Community Prescription (Ch.18) develops "community-based disciples" where "discipleship is expressed through a church characterized by humility, responsibility, purity, accountability, discipline, forgiveness, reconciliation, and restoration."
5. The Olivet Discourse (Ch.24) develops "expectant-sojourner disciples" who are disciples who "live each day...in expectant preparation for his return with power."

Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

The Sawi were headhunters and cannibals when a young couple named Don and Carol Richardson arrived in a Papua, Indonesia village carrying their seven-month-old boy Steve—and a message that would change the tribe forever. The year was 1962, and Steve—and later, three more children—spent their youth among the Sawi, learning the language and embracing the culture in ways that would shape the rest of their lives. Their story was immortalized in the best-selling

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book Peace Child and a feature film of the same name, inspiring a new generation to take the gospel to the remaining isolated tribes of the earth.

Fifty years later, Steve joined his father and two brothers to visit the Sawi village where they grew up. What was the state of the church they planted among the Sawi? Were the friends they played with still alive? Would anyone remember the mark their family left on the tribe? [Watch this video clip to see, from 10:50-12:23: <https://vimeo.com/51281742>]

**Third, he is with us always.** How could these weak, uneducated group of disciples go and make disciples of all nations? They didn't know many languages. They didn't have much money to travel. Jesus promised them, **“And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age.”**

Jesus promised to be with his disciples, with those who love and obey him. Jesus said in John 14:23, “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.”

Jesus promises to build his kingdom through his church, his people, those who love and obey him. We are all full of weaknesses and fears. But Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth. Jesus sends us to make disciples of all nations. Jesus promises to be with us always.

**“Go and make disciples of all nations.”** Are you making progress as a disciple of Jesus Christ? Is someone or a small group helping you to grow as a disciple of Jesus Christ? Are you helping someone personally or as part of a small group to disciple someone in Jesus Christ?

May our Lord help us to love and obey Jesus as his disciples and participate in his desire to make disciples of all nations.