

Week 33: Matthew 28:16–20

Hook



Main Point: As citizens of this kingdom, our mission is to tell everyone about the King and to live as kingdom people here on earth.

All Americans had a role to play in World War II. While nine percent of Americans went overseas to fight in the war, those at home sacrificed and also contributed to the war efforts.ⁱ Food, gas and clothing were rationed. Communities pulled together to conduct scrap-metal drives. Many women entered the workforce to fill jobs as electricians, welders and riveters in defense plants (the female percentage of the United States workforce jumped from 27 to about 37 percent between 1940 and 1945).ⁱⁱ People began to plant “victory gardens,” providing their own vegetables and allowing more food to go to our armed forces. By 1945, around 20 million of these gardens were in use, accounting for around 40 percent of all vegetables consumed in the United States.ⁱⁱⁱ

Q: Why was participation of citizens on the home front critical for the success of the American troops?

Q: Do you know of anyone in your family who either fought in WWII or participated in efforts on the home front? How did their experiences shape them?

Q: What role do Christians play in the expansion of the kingdom of God on earth?

Transition: Today we will explore the Great Commission and be reminded that it is a challenge to be taken up by all believers.

Week 33: Matthew 28:16–20

Book

Main Point: As citizens of this kingdom, our mission is to tell everyone about the King and to live as kingdom people here on earth.

Matthew 28:16–17 [Read]

Talking Point 1: Worship is the only response to the risen Jesus.

In Matthew's story, these are Jesus' last words to His disciples, telling them what to do after He ascended to heaven, how to carry on His mission in the world. Eleven disciples were there, so we know this happened after Judas died, but before they chose Matthias to replace him.

The disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain Jesus had told them to go to in the Upper Room before His death (Mark 14:28). It is significant that Jesus would have them return to Galilee for the Great Commission because Galilee is where His ministry began, where He called them to be disciples. Jesus was so certain of His Resurrection that He told the disciples where to meet Him afterward! As Spiros Zodhiates wrote, "No other person has ever made an appointment to meet someone following his or her death and kept it."^{iv}

We don't know for sure which mountain it was, but it is likely the same mountain on which Jesus was transfigured, Mount Tabor in lower Galilee, at the eastern end of the Jezreel Valley (Matthew 17). In the Old Testament, many theophanies of God occurred on a mountain – the sacrifice of Isaac, the burning bush, the giving of the Law, the covenantal meal with the elders, the giving of the curses/blessings, Elijah's battle with priests of Baal, and so on. Many important things in Matthew happened on a mountain, too – the temptations, the Sermon on the Mount, the Transfiguration, the final discourse on the Mount of Olives, and now the Great Commission.^v

Just as Peter, James and John fell and worshipped Him when they saw the transfigured Jesus in all His glory, the disciples also worshipped when they saw Him resurrected (v. 17). And yet, the text says some of them doubted. How could they doubt when they had the evidence right there in front of them?

There are two different words for doubt in Greek. This one, *distázō*, can mean "to doubt or to hesitate." They hesitated. It was like they couldn't process it all. They didn't know what they were supposed to do next or how to respond. Bible scholar Craig S. Keener wrote, "In this context the expression may connoted troubled indecision – 'littleness of faith' – rather than opposition and unbelief."^{vi}

In the Bible, every time a human being sees the glory of a divine creature, whether an angel or God Himself, or sees a vision of the glory of heaven, they fall on their faces. The Greek here for “worship,” *proskuneó*, literally means to fall prostrate on the ground.^{vii} To bow before a king in the ancient world meant more than just respect; it was a sign of submission and allegiance. It was worship. This is why the faithful exiles refused to bow to idols or statues of foreign kings.

When they saw Jesus, all of the disciples fell down in worship, even if they still had some doubts or hesitations, even though they may have not quite understood what was happening or what it would mean for them. They saw Jesus and fell down in worship, just as anyone else who has ever seen His glory (Ezekiel 1:28; Revelation 1:17). The Bible promises us that one day everyone – in heaven, on earth, and under the earth – will bow before Jesus, even those who reject Him on earth (Philippians 2:10–11). Because when we finally see Jesus in all His heavenly glory, worship will be the only possible reaction.

Q: Share some of your doubts and hesitations about following Jesus with your life. What questions do you still have? What things still hold you back from going all in?

Q: How can you overcome those doubts?

Q: How does it help one another to share our doubts and hesitations openly and honestly?

Matthew 28:18–19 [Read]

Talking Point 2: The Great Commission applies not only to the first generation of disciples, but to all of Jesus’ disciples in every time and place.

Q: What does it mean to make disciples? How can we do that?

Q: Why are we called to make disciples of all nations? Does it mean we have to go to another country to fulfill the Great Commission? Why or why not?

Most of us don’t feel like “evangelists.” It can seem like scary word. Aren’t evangelists the people who get up and preach to crowds of thousands, like Billy Graham? Or those guys who stand on the street corners, witnessing to whoever walks by? But Jesus calls all of us – every person who claims to be His disciple – to be evangelists. That is the Great Commission – *go make disciples*. This is our life’s mission as Christians. Not just the first generation of disciples, but *every single one of us*.^{viii}

That doesn’t mean we are all called to quit our jobs and move to another country to be a missionary, become preachers or write books. *Evangelist* comes from the Greek word for “good news.” It simply means someone who tells other people the Good News about Jesus. All of Jesus’ disciples can and should be evangelists for Him in our everyday lives, wherever God has

placed us. There are people who need to know Jesus all around us every day – the people God has placed in your spheres of influence, people you interact with every day, from your coworkers to the cashier at the Walgreens down the street.

When we read the Great Commission in English, it may look like the command is to “go,” but the word “go” in is actually not the imperative verb of that sentence. “Make disciples” is the imperative. “Go” and “teach” and “baptize” are all participles, which means they describe when, where or how we make disciples.^{ix} So the phrase would be better translated “*as you go*” or “*wherever you go*” or “*whenever you go*” . . . make disciples. The call for each one of us is to make disciples of Jesus Christ everywhere we go, all the time.

The giving of the Great Commission is the very last thing that happens in the book of Matthew, Jesus’ very last words to His disciples in this Gospel. Last words are always important, but especially the last words of a great leader to his successors. Even more dramatic than a death bed command from a king to his successors, Jesus *came back from the dead* to give this command to His disciples! It’s His final charge to them, what He wants them to do to carry on His mission after He has gone back to the Father. This passage has come to be called the Great Commission because it was not just a commission to these first disciples but a universal commission for all disciples in every time and place.

In too many churches, the pastors are the ones who “do ministry,” and the congregation’s job is to just get people to come to church to experience the ministry they are doing there. But that’s not the Great Commission. Jesus calls *every* believer to *go* – to live on mission in their schools, neighborhoods, workplaces, grocery stores, soccer games. You bring Jesus with you into the broken world. The Church is here to equip and train and encourage *you* to go out into the world and make disciples. Just as we send missionaries to Cambodia or Tanzania or Turkey, you are our missionaries to Plano and Lewisville and Prosper and beyond.

We are called to go into all the world, taking the Good News with us. As Paul wrote in Romans, how will they know the Good News unless we take it to them? (Romans 10:14–15). Many people who need to hear about Jesus would never walk through the doors of any church on their own. We have to go out into the world and *take the Good News to them*.

Q: How can you share the Good News with both your words and actions?

Q: If you think of evangelism as just sharing the Good News about Jesus, how does that affect the way you think about evangelism?

Q: Think about your own “spheres of influence” – where you live, work and play, including your online activity. How can you be a witness for Jesus in those places?

Matthew 28:20 and Acts 1:6–8 [Read]

Talking Point 3: Jesus will be with us as we carry out His Great Commission. He will give us the power and the words to speak.

Q: Why is it significant that Jesus promised to be with the disciples always? How is He with us?

Q: How would Jesus' disciples have the power to be His witnesses to the world?

The disciples were probably wondering how they would be able to do all of this without Jesus, after He was gone back to the Father. He had always been the One doing the miracles and astounding people with His teaching. How would they have the wisdom to preach and teach the way He did? How would they know what to say? In Matthew, Jesus promised He would always be with them. In Acts, He told them how – through the Holy Spirit.

The disciples were just ordinary guys, too. They were not well-educated or the cream of the synagogue crop. Yet in the book of Acts, they preached and taught with boldness and passion and with wisdom well beyond their own ability. How? Because of the Holy Spirit dwelling in them. In the beginning of Acts, when Peter and John first started teaching in the temple after the Spirit came down at Pentecost, it says that when the people “saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13). That is how they were able to preach, teach, do miracles, and spread the Gospel throughout the whole world – by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus promised them at the Last Supper that when He went to be with the Father, He would send the Holy Spirit to be with them, guide them, teach them, lead them, and give them power (John 14:15–31). He even promised it would be to their advantage that He go away and send the Spirit instead (John 16:7). As great as it was having Jesus with them, being able to ask Him anything any time, having the Holy Spirit would be *even better*. They would have full access to God's Spirit at all times. The Spirit would give them supernatural wisdom (1 Corinthians 2) and power (Acts 1:8). He would bring them new life, make them a new creation, and grow His spiritual fruit in them, changing them from the inside out (Galatians 5:16–26).

Jesus' mission for His disciples is at the very end of the book of Matthew, but at the very beginning of the book of Acts – because the Gospels are the story of *Jesus'* work on earth and Acts is the story of how *the Church* continued His mission in the world. In Acts, Jesus told the disciples *how* they were to fulfill the Great Commission of making disciples:

1) *through the power of the Holy Spirit*. When we read the book of Acts, it is so clear that they did everything by the power of the Spirit. When the Spirit said go, they went. When the Spirit said stop, they stopped. The Spirit empowered them to do mighty things and was involved in their day-to-day lives. You could even call the book “The Acts of the Holy Spirit” instead of “The Acts of the Apostles” because it is really the story of the Spirit working through them.

2) *by being His witnesses*. In court, when witnesses testify, they just tell their story – what they have seen and heard. They don’t have to tell the whole story of the whole situation, because they don’t even know that. They just have to tell *their* story, what they know to be true. The same is true for us as witnesses for Christ. It’s OK if we don’t have all the answers. We don’t have to have a degree in apologetics or biblical studies to be His witnesses. We simply need to tell what we know, what we have seen and heard, what Jesus has done in our lives.

Of course, the more we study the Bible, the more we will know about *the story* of how God has worked in the world. The more time we spend with Jesus, the more we will have to say about how He has changed us, not just in the moment of salvation and new birth, but how He is changing us every day through His Holy Spirit. But even from the very first moment we believe, we all have a testimony to share. Even a brand new disciple can make more disciples.

Jesus told His disciples they would be His witnesses in Jerusalem (their city), in Judea (their nation) and Samaria (their enemies), and to the ends of the earth. Through the rest of Acts, we see them doing just that. Some of the disciples stayed in Jerusalem and some spread out to other nations. In the same way, we can be His witnesses where we already are or to the ends of the earth, wherever God calls us.

All you have to do is tell your story of how Jesus has changed your life and how He is working in you right now. You can share in bits and pieces at different times as it fits naturally into conversation. It doesn’t have to be eloquent enough to preach to thousands of people. If you speak from the heart, and you have built an authentic relationship with them, people will know you are sharing your faith out of love, not judgment. And the way they respond isn’t your responsibility. That’s God’s job. You’re just a witness – both with your words and with your life. The Holy Spirit does the work of changing people’s hearts (1 Corinthians 3). Like the disciples in the book of Acts, we are to follow the Holy Spirit wherever He leads, to speak the truth boldly, and to pray for God’s intervention (Acts 4:23–31).

Q: How can you better listen to the leading of the Holy Spirit?

Q: If you had to share your testimony of what Jesus is doing in your life *right now* (not just how you came to know Him), what would you say?

Q: Think about what it really means to “make disciples,” to go beyond just witnessing to people to actually *discipling* them. How would our church’s ministry be even more effective if every disciple invested their lives in discipling a small group of other people?

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Took

Main Point: As citizens of this kingdom, our mission is to tell everyone about the King and to live as kingdom people here on earth.

Have you been neglecting the charge of the Great Commission? There are some excellent tools at Prestonwood to help you take your first steps. The 3 Circles method of evangelism is an easy way to share your faith. *Starting Point* is a discipleship resource in which you mentor or receive mentorship. There are opportunities to disciple others in Children’s Ministry, Prestonwood Students, marriage ministry and so many others. If you are interested in becoming more equipped to share your faith/mentor or places to serve in these areas, please contact your division minister.

CHALLENGES

THINK: How is God leading you to make disciples in your spheres of influence – where you live, work, and play? Name some people in those spheres of influence who might need to know Jesus. Pray for them and pray for God to give you opportunities to be a witness to them. Think further, beyond witnessing to discipling someone in their faith. Whom may God be calling you to invest your time in, to mentor and disciple, walking alongside that person, and guiding him or her in following Jesus? Or if you feel you aren’t ready to mentor other people yet, consider whom God may want you to ask to mentor and disciple you.

PRAY for those all over the world who don’t know Jesus. Pray for those you know by name in your family or spheres of influence, but also pray for the nations around the world where people don’t know Jesus. Pray for missionaries to reach those places and pray about how you can financially and prayerfully support their work in the world.

ACT: Discipling. Whether you feel ready to disciple someone else or feel as though God is leading you to ask someone to disciple you, act on that leading. Approach that person and ask if he or she wants to enter a discipling relationship.

ⁱ <https://www.historynet.com/what-percentage-of-the-population-served-in-ww2.htm>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/american-women-in-world-war-ii-1>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/us-home-front-during-world-war-ii>

^{iv} Spiros Zodhiates, *Exegetical Commentary on Matthew* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2006).

^v N. T. Wright, *Matthew for Everyone, Part II* (London, UK: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2002).

^{vi} Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1999).

^{vii} Joseph Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek Lexicon* (Chesapeake, VA: National Foundation for Christian Education, 1889).

^{viii} Francis Chan, *Multiply* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2012).

^{ix} Ronald Blue, *Evangelism and Missions* (Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, 2001).