

Sunday, October 16, 2022 | Upon This Rock

Matthew 28:16-20 | "Church Objective"

Last week, we started a new series called *Upon This Rock*. And this study is designed to help the believer answer two questions: "what is the church" and "what is its purpose." How a person answers those questions will significantly impact their life. And we began to answer those questions by looking at the church's origins in Matthew 16. There, we learned that Peter, like all true believers, is the substance of the church. The church is not a building but a people who confess that Jesus Christ is the Messiah. We can be the church's foundation when we are at our best. But we are not always at our best. When we're at our worst, we become a stumbling block. This is precisely what happened to Peter. He misunderstood Jesus' mission and tried to stand in the Messiah's way. Therefore, in order to avoid making the same mistakes that Peter made, we must understand that to follow Jesus—i.e., to be the church—we must deny what we want and devote ourselves to Jesus' suffering.

Today, we'll move to the end of Jesus' earthly ministry, which, coincidentally, was the same time the church began its earthly ministry. From this moment, launched a worldwide movement. Given time, Jesus' followers would grow from a handful of people in the backwaters of the Middle East to an innumerable mass like the stars in the sky and the sand by the sea. But what was the cause of such explosive growth? Those first few disciples took to heart the Great Commission and made it their life's goal to achieve Jesus' objective for the church. As such, we are but the most recent converts in a long line of disciples who were doing nothing more than making other disciples, a task that has yet to be completed and is still well underway today.

READ: Matthew 28:16-20 (ESV)

¹⁶ Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷ And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. ¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ 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, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

The church's objective is comprised of four components:

i. **One Principle: Jesus has all the authority.**

Jesus said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." This is similar to the very thing Satan offered him at the beginning of his ministry (cf. Matt. 4:1-11). The difference back then, however, was that Satan only offered to give Jesus authority on *earth*, not *heaven*. And while Jesus might've been able to get out of suffering on the cross had he taken Satan up on his offer, the Lord would've become subservient to the Devil. As it stands, Jesus is subservient only to the Father, and God has given his Son dominion and rule over both the earth below and the heavens above.

ii. One Command: Make disciples of all the nations.

A ton of study has been done on whether there is one command or four. Some would argue that the Great Commission is comprised of the commands to "go," to "make," to "baptize," and to "teach." And while there is some truth to that, I would argue that since only one of those verbs is in the imperative mood and the other three are participles, technically, the only command is "make disciples."

This is not to say that the participles do not hold some binding force. Considering that they are directly associated with the command to make disciples, they, of course, have the strength of an imperative.¹ However, the main point of the Great Commission is *not* to go, to baptize, nor to teach but to *make disciples*. One can go somewhere without making disciples. One can even baptize someone in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and then teach them all that Jesus commanded without them becoming true disciples. Our job isn't simply to get a profession of faith and to proselytize the masses. No. We are commanded to make, form, and pattern converts into becoming lifelong followers of Jesus. Just because one may go to church, have a conversion story, and listen to the teachings of Jesus does not mean they're a true disciple. For centuries, thousands of people have checked off those boxes and given Jesus mere lip service while their hearts and hands were far from him. The only outward evidence I know that indicates that someone is a disciple of Jesus is that a person is making other disciples. Simply put, a disciple of Jesus is a "discipler"—i.e., a disciple-maker.

Now, since Jesus' authority knows no bounds, so, too, do his directives know no bounds. Jesus did not send the disciples to one nation or a few nations, but to all the nations did he send his disciples. Because the Lord's dominion stretches from the east to the west, so will his focus and followers. As one commentator put it, "Universal Lordship means universal mission."² Jesus

¹ Carson, D. A., *Matthew*, Matthew & Mark, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Revised Edition, Volume 9, (Grand Rapids, MI; Zondervan Academic, 2010), p. 666

² Turner, David L., *Matthew*, The Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI; Baker Academic, 2008), p. 689, quoting from W. Davies and Allison (1997, p. 684).

said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...." This directive knows no limits. Literally understood, Jesus was sending his disciples not only to the Jews but the Romans. He would have them go into the farthest reaches of the compass. But metaphorically, I think we can apply this directive to those who are not called to go to foreign lands. Just because you are not a missionary nor in the ministry in some "official" capacity does not excuse you from "making disciples." As Christians, we are called not only to cross a country's borderline in the name of Jesus, but also, we are called to cross political aisles, economic classes, and social divides.

iii. Two Methods: Baptize new disciples in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and teach them to obey all of Jesus' commands.

Jesus not only set a command before his followers, but he also set the method by which his order was to be obeyed. Jesus' preferred method for making disciples is two-fold: "**baptizing** them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **teaching** them to observe all that I have commanded you...." We make disciples by *baptizing* and *teaching*. And baptism is, specifically, a word that denotes full-body-emersion in the name of our heavenly Father, his only Son, and the Holy Spirit. We'll delve more into baptism in a couple of weeks, but, suffice it to say, it is one of two ordinances of the church, with the other being communion. A helpful way of understanding the church's ordinances is to view baptism as the "front door" and communion as the "family meal."³ Notice, too, that Jesus wants us to baptize in the "name" (singular), not "names" (plural). Core to our faith is a belief in a triune God, where three distinct persons reside in one harmonious being. Each is entirely unique without being separate from the others, and each holds divine status, so much so that to speak to one as God is to talk to them all as God. Hence, this is why we like to say, "God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit."

Not only that, but teaching is also at the core of every **true** church. And not just any teaching, but a teaching that is rooted in *all* of the *commands* of Jesus. Not some, but all. And not suggestions, but commandments. And interestingly, teaching can come in a variety of practices. We can teach through activity, prayer, music, and so on. Methods have a powerful sway over the education or (given a negative context) miseducation of the people. But primarily, when Jesus refers to "teaching," he is speaking about communicating via speech, where an orator conveys information to an audience. This is what we might rightly call "preaching."

³ Leeman, Jonathan, *What Is the Church's Mission*, Church Questions Series, (Wheaton, IL; Crossway, 2022), p. 51.

Every good and biblical sermon is nothing more and nothing less than explaining and extrapolating each and every commandment of the Lord Jesus. A preacher who preaches good ideas but not the literal words of Jesus is no preacher at all but a peddler of snake oils and half-promises. He is laying another foundation and selling another gospel. My job, as a pastor, is to take the teachings of Jesus and show you how we ought to apply God's word to our life. This is why Lording willing, we'll be starting a new multi-year series through the Gospel of Luke after this series. How are you supposed to do everything that Jesus wants you to do if I am not doing my job in explaining to you at last one of the Gospels?

iv. One Promise: Jesus is with us all the days.

Jesus gives the church a command and its prescribed methods for achieving his objective. But he also promised us: "I am with you always, to the end of the age." Matthew does not end his gospel with a command but a promise. No matter where his disciples would go, no matter what country they would find themselves in, and no matter if they were among known or unknown lands, Jesus would go with them. He would not abandon them to the world. As D.A. Carson puts it, "He who is introduced to us in the prologue as Immanuel, "God with us" (1:23; cf. 18:20), is still God with us, "to the very end of the age.""⁴

Interestingly, Matthew starts and ends his gospel by pointing out the ever-present nature of Jesus Christ (cf. 1:23; 28:20). Now, that Matthew's gospel ends with a promise is something that has often been pointed out. And while this is true, may we not overlook the fact that this promise ("I am with you always, even to the end of the age.") is inseparable from a very particular command: "go and make disciples of all nations..." This means that the great promise of Jesus' eternal presence was specifically offered to those who obeyed the Great Commission.

Now, let me be clear. No, I am not saying that one must abide by the Great Commission in order to have the ever-presence of Jesus. All those who profess Jesus as the Christ are possessed of Christ, never be lost, stolen, or plucked out of his hand. And the verb tense is in the present, not the future. He is already with us whether we've gone to make disciples or not. But the point I'm trying to make is that only those who "go and make disciples" truly understand what Jesus' promise never to abandon them actually means.

In the same way that a child who is not afraid does not need their parent's reassurance, a person who ignores the Great Commission has little need to be reassured of Jesus' presence. Why would they need to be buoyed in this way when they've never felt the fear that comes

with obeying Jesus' calling on their life? Only those who have experienced the isolation that accompanies following Jesus can genuinely appreciate his never-ending presence.

Thus, for those who may think, "I have never been afraid to follow Jesus," may I lovingly suggest that it may not be because you are some paradigm of courage but because you have never been brought to the bounds of your own courage; that, you've not yet followed Jesus into truly unknown places with uncertain futures filled with unfamiliar people. From personal experience, I can guarantee that fearlessness and the Great Commission do not go hand in hand. It is often at the precipice of our fears where faith begins.

So, what's the takeaway?

The church's objective is disciples making disciples.

In the beginning, humanity's first commission as God's creation was to "multiply" (cf. Gen. 1:28). But now, our purpose is no longer to "make babies" but to "make disciples." It is in our nature to reproduce what we are. This is how God designed us. Thus, if we are followers of Jesus, we will naturally produce others to be followers of Jesus. But, be warned, if we ourselves do not follow Jesus, well, who knows what sort of twisted fruit will come from our labors.

Being a disciple means adhering to what the Lord Jesus taught you. This lifestyle is not exclusive to Sundays. It spills over into every part of the week. Personally, this means that I am the sort of father that Jesus wants me to be. It means I'm the sort of husband Jesus wants me to be. It means that I'm the sort of brother, friend, neighbor, grocery-goer, restaurant patron, American citizen, and Marylander that Jesus wants me to be. Being a disciple transforms every area of our life so much so that there is no part that does not have the marks of Jesus on it. It also transforms evangelism so that it may look, practically, like a variety of things. As a parent, I will try to raise my kids so that they might know who Jesus is and what he did for me. As a neighbor, I may need to knock on their door and invite them to church. Still, it may also, just as likely, be taking care of a need they have (i.e., getting to know the name of their animals/kids/loved ones, mowing their grass, having a conversation, praying for them, saving their mail from the rain, inviting them over for dinner for the sole purpose of getting to know them, etc.).

READ: Matthew 5:13-16 (ESV)

¹³ "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. ¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light

to all in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Salt and light are so distinctive that they cannot help but be noticed wherever they're present. Are you as noticeable as they are? The thing that distinguishes salt from pepper and light from darkness is Jesus. To be a disciple of the Son of God makes one different.

Video Description

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Pastor's manuscript can be found here: