

The King's Speech

Matthew 28:16-20

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We are on the final lap to concluding our series on the kingdom of God from the Gospel of Matthew. We have a couple more messages, but today we look at perhaps the key passage in Matthew and one of the most important in the entire New Testament. Why? The same reason why on June 6, 1944 the following words were so powerful and poignant. They came from Supreme Commander Dwight Eisenhower to the armies on D-Day. Here is part of it:

"Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen of the Allied Expeditionary Force! You are about to embark upon the Great Crusade, toward which we have striven these many months. The eyes of the world are upon you. The hopes and prayers of liberty-loving people everywhere march with you.... Your task will not be an easy one. Your enemy is well trained, well equipped and battle hardened. He will fight savagely. But this is the year 1944!.... The tide has turned! The free men of the world marching together to Victory! I have full confidence in your courage, devotion to duty and skill in battle. We will accept nothing less than full Victory! Good Luck! And let us all beseech the blessing of Almighty God upon this great and noble undertaking."¹

With those words ringing in their ears, the soldiers headed for the beaches of Normandy and ultimately to victory. The speech laid out the mission. It was honest about the challenge. It was confident in ultimate victory.

Kings. Presidents. Generals. The Gipper. To be effective leaders they have to make it clear what the mission is so that everyone can rally to it. The kingdom of God is no different. The church's mission is no different. We have to know why we are here. What is the purpose? What direction are we heading?

I had a woman share with me recently how much she doesn't like all these new roundabouts that cities are putting in. She told me she got so confused that she just kept going around and around and didn't know where to go. She might still be going around for all I know.

Churches and Christians are the same and we can so easily forget why we are here or we replace our main objective with some other mission. We just keep going around and around. Matthew ends his whole Gospel with a speech. The King's speech with the King's mission for all those in his kingdom. It tells us why we are here and what direction we must go.

"Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."
(Matthew 28:16-20 ESV)

¹ Dwight D. Eisenhower, "Document for June 6th: D-Day statement to soldiers, sailors, and airmen of the Allied Expeditionary Force," June 6, 1944, www.archives.gov.

Picking up the time line, Jesus was raised to life on Easter morning. He appeared to the disciples and others that day. Eight days later Jesus appears again to the disciples including Thomas. The disciples go to Galilee and seven of them are fishing and Jesus appears to them on shore. This is the famous, "Peter, feed my sheep" conversation. After that, on a mountain in Galilee, perhaps with 500 other disciples, the 11 disciples (12 minus Judas) see Jesus from a distance. *"And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted."* (Verse 17)

This is either a confusing verse or a wonderfully helpful one. I think it's wonderfully helpful. Here are Jesus' own disciples standing before the resurrected Savior. Some are ready to offer their full surrender and worship him. But others doubted. Really? How could they doubt? For the same reason most of us struggle with doubt at times, and we've never seen the risen Christ. These doubting disciples were human. They are standing before the majesty of the glorified Son of God. They are overwhelmed. They are confused. They can't quite put it all together. Ever feel that way? It leads them to doubt.

I have used the verse with people who struggle with doubt about the Christian faith or have things they can't understand. They think they have to understand it all in order to become a Christian. Doubt is a very human quality and I suspect at one point or another all of us doubt. Doubt is not the opposite of faith. Unbelief is the opposite of faith. There's room in genuine Christianity for doubts, wonderings, and things beyond categories of understanding. I think that is what's going on here. They are still struggling to comprehend it all, kind of like we do too.

The Empowerment for the Mission: Jesus' Absolute Authority

And now Jesus' famous words, *"And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.'"* (Verse 18)

I thought Jesus always had authority. Didn't his miracles prove that? Jesus did have authority by divine right as God incarnate. He exercised it during his earthly ministry. However, the sphere of that authority was not over heaven and earth. God the Father ruled heaven. Satan ruled earth. Remember in the wilderness temptation, what did Satan offer Jesus? *All the kingdoms of this world, if you will bow to me.* (Matthew 4:9) Satan offered him earth but couldn't offer him heaven. Now, by virtue of his obedience to the Father's will and victory over sin and death, the Father grants to Jesus all authority over everything everywhere. The only thing not under Jesus' authority is God the Father himself.

We obviously don't see a world in submission to Jesus. It would seem to be in rebellion toward Jesus. Someday that will change.

"Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2:9-11)

Someday, ISIS will bow. Someday Satan will bow. Someday that profane guy at work will bow. Someday demons will bow. We don't see it now, but Jesus is ruling and reigning now. Someday all will bow. Jesus grounds the radical nature of the mission in the unchangeable reality of his absolute authority over everything everywhere. What I'm commanding you to do, do because of who I am.

The Essence of the Mission: Make Disciples

"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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:19-20)

This is a verse where getting the grammar right is so key. Like English, the Greek uses tenses of words to communicate emphasis. In this verse there is one imperative and then participles that surround it to explain the character and nature of the imperative. Take a look below. What do you think the imperative is?

"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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you."

Matthew 28:19-20 (ESV)

What are the participles?

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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you."

Matthew 28:19-20 (ESV)

Let's begin with the imperative of the mission. **Make disciples.** It is a command. It is the prime directive of the mission. It is the essence of why we exist. *Make disciples.* What's the point of a church? Here is how we say it at Bethel, "**Our mission is to make fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ whose lives are all about Him.**"

If that is our mission, do we know what a disciple is? Essentially, it is to follow the leadership and teachings of another. The meaning is captured in the words Jesus said to Matthew (Levi) himself when he called him as a disciple. Jesus said, "*Follow me.*" (Luke 5:27)

The mission of the church is to make disciples. Making disciples includes the beginning of discipleship—conversion normally through evangelism. It also includes the process of growing and maturing in our spiritual lives, called progressive growth or progressive sanctification. The new birth and the new life are all part of the mission.

It's like saying, *how do we make brain surgeons?* In the immortal words of the Jackson 5, "*A-B-C, it's easy as 1-2-3.*"² No. Brain surgeons aren't made overnight. It's a long process of growing, learning, and becoming.

A healthy church and healthy Christians will be intentionally active in both the beginning and the process. Multiplying and maturing. Evangelism and edification. Jesus describes what making disciples will entail: *Going. Baptizing. Teaching.*

The "Go" mission

The co-mission is a "Go" mission. There is nuance to the word and lots of arguing about whether Jesus was requiring everyone to go somewhere different from where they live (a favorite theme of missions conferences) or if Jesus was saying as you go or as you live your life, make disciples.

Here's what I think. The mission is to make disciples of all nations. Whether exegetically it is required to "go," logically, it certainly is. How are disciples made in all the people groups of the world if everyone stays right where they are?

At the same time, not everybody can go and the goers need senders to support them and make disciples on the home front. It takes both goers and senders and this word has something to say to those who are on mission in their own Jerusalem. *Make disciples!* It's not just pastors and missionaries. In a sense we are all missionaries. It really is a lifestyle. We are disciples ourselves who are on this mission to multiply ourselves by intentionally helping to make disciples.

So if Jesus asked you today, *what are you doing to obey my command to make disciples?* what would you say? Think about it.

Baptize them!

Right in the King's speech is baptism. It's not the central word; make disciples is. But it's right in there with it. Not only is this a command to baptize but it is also a command to be baptized. A disciple begins his following of Jesus by following this command to be baptized. Are you a Christian? Have you been baptized? The early church would have been confused

² Barry Gordy Jr, Alphonso Mizell, Deke Richards, Freddie Perren, "ABC," 1969, Motown Records/Capital Music Group/Universal Music Group

by someone who claimed to be a Christian and wasn't baptized. They'd be like, you know Jesus told us to be baptized so what's up with that? *It hasn't worked into my schedule. I'm just not ready. I don't want to offend my family, blah, blah, blah.*

The great commission isn't a buffet bar where you pick and choose what you want. All of it is important because the King of kings commanded it. Churches, baptize! Christians, be baptized! If you want to be baptized, tell us. Let's get on with it. Let's get obedient.

Teach, teach, teach what Jesus taught, like Jesus did

"Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:20)

Every few years somebody comes along and says, enough with the teaching and doctrine; let's just love people. Jesus commands love elsewhere, but the great commission inescapably prioritized teaching what Jesus taught to disciples so that we may grow. Jesus modeled this himself. The early church was filled with teaching and preaching. This doesn't simply mean pulpit teaching, but the loving of God's Word and a culture of yearning for learning. Not as an end, but as a means to knowing Jesus better.

Jesus concludes with a powerful encouragement.

The Encouragement in the Mission: *I am with You Always*

Our King doesn't just promise his *power*, he promises his *presence* with us in the mission. All authority. All peoples. Always with us. His authority is trans-spherical. Creation. World. Heaven. Hell. All authority. His presence includes all those spheres, but he adds, *"even to the end of the age."* His presence with us transcends time. Every second until the end of all history, he is with us.

We learn later in Acts at Pentecost that his presence with us is through the Holy Spirit who is also called the Spirit of Christ (Romans 8:9). A good Trinitarian theology allows us to understand the unity of the Godhead and not to be somehow disappointed in the Holy Spirit. Jesus said having the Holy Spirit is even better than having Jesus himself with us.

What a promise! *As you go, as you make disciples, as you reach the nations, I am always with you.* David wrote something similar, *"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me."* (Psalm 23:4) Every sphere. Every age. Everywhere. He is with us, in the success and the failures. In the ups and downs of life, he is always with us. Right now. Right here. Jesus is with Bethel Church. Do you believe that?

Jesus' Mission and Bethel Church: More AND Better Disciples

This passage provides us with an opportunity to hold up what we are *supposed* to be doing and hold up what we *are* doing and ask, *how are we doing?*

I'm going to give you my pastoral perspective. I think in some ways we are doing well and in some ways we have lots of room for improvement. In a church as diverse as ours it's hard to say everyone is this way or that. So with a broad brush stroke, I think Jesus is challenging us to multiply and mature. To have as our goal more and better disciples. I think we are as a whole better at maturing disciples here than we are at multiplying disciples. We have a lot of people who come to our church. Many thousands of people were

here on Easter as an example of the scope of our church. However, Jesus doesn't say make a crowd, he says, make disciples.

Many people come to our church and they like the expositional, doctrinal, gospel-centered feel. Great. We want that. Many people grow here. Grow magnificently. Not everyone. There are plenty of stagnant Christians to be found around our church, but that is outside the flow of what is taught and I hope modeled.

The goal of the mission is more and better disciples. I think we really need to grow in more size. Not simply with people coming to our church from dead churches or ancient churches, we have many, many people who come from those contexts and you are welcome here and we are glad you are here. If I was you, I'd do the same thing.

Where we need to grow is a culture of mission in the day-to-day of life, looking for opportunities to nurture relationships toward gospel conversations. If I asked, who has had a gospel conversation with someone you have built a relationship with, in the last 2 weeks, month, year? How far back would I have to go for you to raise your hand?

"Scripture anchors evangelism in our lived-out, new-creation identity in Christ; it's a lifestyle. We are, as my friend Walter McCray has written, "Gospelizers"—people who have been radicalized by the good news in and from Jesus the Christ. We have been changed by the hope-filled, faith-giving news of His divinity and humanity, His life and death, resurrection and ascension, and His return to reign and rule over and through all who authentically believe in Him."³

"Gospelizers." I like that. If you are not going to the nations geographically, then we are called to be "going" to the people we meet in the day-to-day of life. Seeking more disciples of Jesus by personally loving and leading the people in our life toward Jesus.

I'm further wondering about our church's corporate responsibility to the people groups that are right here in Northwest Indiana. Think about our Mission Them initiative in light of Matthew 28: *"Bethel Church exists to multiply disciples through multiple sites and multiple partnerships."*

That sounds like what Jesus said, doesn't it? I'm just wondering out loud with you, *might God be calling us to target people groups right here around us?* We already have initiatives in the Chinese community. Might God allow us to multiply in a more organized way there? I talked with a Latino pastor this week who told me of the great need for a gospel-centered, expositional type Hispanic church in Northwest Indiana. Would a church like ours seeking more and better disciples from the nations seek, pray, fund intentional outreaches to people groups like this as direct obedience to Jesus' command? Would Jesus applaud such efforts?

What could we do? I honestly am not sure. But it gets me excited to think about the possibilities. We do what we do because he is who he is, knowing as we do it, he is with us to the end of the age. The King's speech. The Great Commission. Our mission. More and better disciples. Let's do it For the King.

Scripture quotations are taken from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version. ESV® Permanent Text Edition® (2016).* Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

³ Phil Miglioratti, "The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: What Does Evangelism Look Like in Your Day-to-Day Life?" *The Exchange*, www.ChristianityToday.com, April 26, 2017.

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