THE GREAT COMMISSION

Matthew 28:16-20

This morning we’re wrapping up our study of Matthew looking at the last few verses of this book commonly called, “The Great Commission;” or as some have referred to it in recent years, “The Great Omission.” We’ll take a close look at this passage and see what our Lord told His disciples.

We live in a fallen world filled with many people who are hostile to Christianity. Sin is rampant even among Christians. There is often much heartache, trouble, persecution, sickness, failure, disappointment and so on. We long to be free from all of that and to be in perfect fellowship with Christ. We can’t wait to see Jesus and to be reunited with many of our family and friends who have gone on to be with the Lord already. The question has been raised, why is it that God leaves us here when we get saved rather than taking us on home to be with Him? This passage here in Matthew 28 answers that question.

READ Matthew 28:16-20 *[comment on the eleven disciples and on the mountain to which Jesus had directed them]*

The Great Commission. It’s a very familiar passage. The reason why God doesn’t take us on to heaven right after we get saved is because He has a mission for us. He has something He wants His believers, His church to do. So what is our mission? To make disciples…of all the nations.

OK, what does it mean to make disciples, disciples of Jesus Christ? The word disciple means a learner, a student, an apprentice, specifically one who is taught and then follows the instruction of a certain teacher. Rick Warren in his book “The Purpose Driven Life” says that a disciple of Jesus is one who (1) is living to please God; (2) is an active member of a local body of believers; (3) is learning to be more Christ-like in their behavior; (4) is serving sacrificially within the local body of believers; (5) is sharing God’s love, forgiveness and hope with people who do not know Christ.

So there is a lot to being a disciple of Jesus Christ. It is a lifelong process to be sure. If we are going to make disciples then we must be disciples ourselves and teach people about the saving love of Christ, present them with the gospel message. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10) and we are to continue that work – seeking the lost and telling them how to be saved.

READ Mark 16:15. So being a disciple begins with hearing and believing the gospel. But it doesn’t stop there. Once a person comes to faith in Christ we have the responsibility to follow up and get them plugged into a local body of believers where they can begin to learn all aspects of being a disciple, to begin to grow and mature in their faith.

READ Luke 24:45-48. Part of discipleship involves a study of the scriptures, Bible study, we begin with the basics and then gradually delve in deeper. The purpose for Bible study is not merely to gain more knowledge, but to become better disciples as we learn what God wants us to do, how God wants us to behave, reshaping our priorities, dealing with our sin issues, relationships and so forth.

READ Acts 1:8. The Holy Spirit who came to indwell us believers when we were saved is the One who empowers us to be disciples ourselves. And He is the One who empowers us to then go out and make disciples.

“Make disciples…of all nations” – the church’s mission is to make disciples not just locally, but regionally, nationally and globally. That’s why our church and correctly so puts so much emphasis on missions. That’s why we give to missions and why we go on mission trips and why we pray for our missionaries and invite our missionaries to come share with us.

That’s all very basic. What I am going to do now is go back to our Matthew passage and look at it in more detail. *[go back to Matthew 28 slide]* There are several aspects to being a disciple and making disciples that Jesus teaches here.

READ Matthew 28:16

The first aspect of discipleship I want you to see is availability. The disciples showed up to the place where Jesus had directed them. They were in the appointed place at the appointed time. That’s a good start!

It is very likely that this could well have been the event that Paul mentions in 1 Cor 15:6 when Jesus “appeared to more than 500 brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.” Of course Paul would have written that approximately 25 years after this event. And Galilee is where most of the believers lived. In John Chapter 6 the large crowd that followed Jesus to Capernaum are referred to as “disciples.” In Luke Chapter 10 Jesus appoints 72 others whom He sends out two by two to the various cities in Galilee to preach the kingdom and to heal the sick. Many of those whom Jesus healed became followers of His. We know that two of His own brothers living in Nazareth came to faith after His resurrection. So I think it is very likely that there are more than just the 11 disciples who assembled together on this mountain in Galilee at this time. I think there are many, many more disciples of Jesus who are gathered here.

As I thought about the importance of being available, being willing, being in the right place at the right time I thought of Isaiah (6:8):“Here I am! Send me.” I thought of Mary (Luke 1:38) who when told that she had been chosen to bear the Son of God said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to Your word.” I thought of Samuel lying in his bed that night when God called him (1 Sam 3:10) – “Speak, for your servant hears.” Are you attentive to the call of God on your life? Are you listening? Are you willing and available to be used by Him as He sees fit?

READ Matthew 28:17

Many of these disciples are seeing the resurrected Lord for the very first time. He’s already appeared to the 11 back in Jerusalem a couple of times, but as for many of the others, this is their very first time to see Jesus since His death and resurrection. How fitting it is that Matthew begins his gospel account with the wise men worshipping Jesus and he ends his gospel with Jesus’ disciples worshipping Him. This is the proper response to our King. He is worthy of our worship. He is worthy not only because of Who He is, the Son of God, but because of what He has done for us on the cross. So a second aspect of being a disciple of Jesus Christ is to worship Him as Lord. We worship out of our love for Him!

We are told in this passage that “some doubted.” Why would Matthew include this? Well, doubt is a normal part of human sinful nature. Jesus is appearing here in His resurrected body. It very likely appears somewhat different from His normal non-resurrected body. I don’t think necessarily the doubt spoken about here is sinful doubt as just honest doubt – “Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief!” How does Jesus handle their doubt? In verse 18 he comes to them and speaks to them. His loving manner and His voice reassures them.

Well what did Jesus say to them? READ Matthew 28:18

All authority! He’s sovereign. He’s in charge. He is our Lord and we are His disciples, His servants. Paul referred to himself as “a bond servant” or “a slave” of Jesus Christ. Paul saw himself as a servant who willingly committed himself to serve his Master, Jesus Christ out of his love and respect for Him. So, the third aspect of being a disciple of Jesus is that we acknowledge that He is our Lord and has every right to rule and reign in our life. Whatever He tells us to do, we are willing to do.

He goes on to say… READ Matthew 28:19-20a

“Go therefore…” I have something I want you to do. They aren’t coming to you – you need to go to them. “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations…” How do we make disciples? By going, baptizing them and teaching them. We present the good news, the gospel message. We tell them how they can be saved. The Holy Spirit then convicts them, they believe and make a public confession of their belief (in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus). They confess with their mouth Jesus Christ as Lord and then they demonstrate their obedient faith by being baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. That’s where it all begins. Obedient faith. Then we teach them what Jesus taught us. We get them into the word and into fellowship with other believers who can help them in their Christian walk. And the only way they will know what to do is if you go to them and I go to them and we tell them. So the fourth aspect of being a disciple of Christ is obedience. We go because He told us to go. And we make disciples because He told us to make disciples.

READ Matthew 28:20b

Jesus promises His disciples assembled on that Galilean hillside that He will be with them always to “the end of the age” – to the second coming. Immanuel, “God with us.” He was with us in the flesh for 30-plus years. He was with us in His glorified body for about a month a half. He will be with us until He returns. Shortly after this event Jesus ascends back to heaven from another mountain, the Mount of Olives. And soon after that as promised He sends the Comforter, the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. God, the Holy Spirit is with us. He is the One who empowers us, gives us the words to say in order to carry out the Great Commission. So the last aspect of being a disciple of Christ is power. We have been given the power of God through the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

As disciples of Jesus we are available; we worship Him for Who He is and for what He has done for us; we willingly submit to His authority; we are obedient servants involved in making disciples – not in our own strength, but by the power that He has given us thru the Holy Spirit

*[Time permitting read the MacArthur application of the Great Commission]*