

MATTHEW 28:16-20

WEEK 4



Historical Context & Background

Matthew's account of the life of Jesus is a peculiar beginning to the collections of writings we call the New Testament. It opens with an extensive genealogy, which is actually saying something crucial: *the story of Israel, the children of Abraham, the people of God's salvation covenant, is fulfilled in Jesus*. From the very beginning, we see that Matthew is writing to a largely Jewish audience to show Jesus is the messiah, the redeemer of Israel. Much of how we read and understand Matthew's writing make sense through the lens of a 1st century Jewish audience. Over and over again, Matthew highlights Jesus' connection to the law and the prophets. The Sermon on the Mount, the Transfiguration, Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, and so many other events in Matthew's account point to Jesus being the culmination of the Old Testament story. However, that invites the question: *If I'm not a Jewish person from the 1st century, is Matthew's gospel account for me?*

Good news! Another key theme of Matthew's account is that the gospel of Jesus, the story of God's redemption plan, is not just for Israel; it's for the world. In multiple circumstances, Jesus challenges the idea that the story of God is only for Israel, but for people who were outsiders of God's people as well. We see this reality culminate in the final passage of Matthew, the passage that we are reading this week, known as "The Great Commission." Jesus declares that God's story is for the "nations," not just Israel. But at the same time it reveals that the story of Israel is the story of the one, true, living God. The story of Jesus is the fulfillment of the story of Israel and the launching of redemption for the world. It is not the end of the story, it is moving on to a new chapter, a New Testament. We are not called to simply remember God's story that happened long ago, we are characters in a new chapter. We are invited to live in God's story now.



Related Passages

1 Corinthians 15 - Paul's gospel testimony

John 20:19-31 - Jesus & Thomas' doubt

Daniel 7:14 - Prophecy of Christ's authority and unending kingdom



Key Terms

Commission: to delegate responsibility, giving of tasks, invitation to join in mission; this is exciting, because we can understand the word through its construction: co-mission. Jesus invites

his followers into his mission, his salvation plan for his beloved world.

Galilee: a region in the North of Israel; it is the region where the majority of Jesus' ministry centered; in the time of Jesus it was like the "sticks" of Israel, often thought to be less sophisticated or important than Judah, the region around Jerusalem.

Nations: When Jesus says to make disciples of all nations, he doesn't just mean go to every country, like Belgium or Tanzania or Mongolia. The word nations really means more like every "ethnic group" or "people group."

"All": After extensive research we found the word actually means *all*.



Key Themes

"But some doubted": There is a warning and an encouragement in v. 17: Even some who saw the risen Jesus doubted. The Message translates this passage in a really helpful way, "*Some, though, held back, not sure about worship, about risking themselves totally.*" We need to be aware that we are never impervious to doubt, but we shouldn't despair in this truth. Because in this same passage Jesus entrusts his redemption mission to even some of those who wrestled with doubt when they saw his risen body. Jesus is gracious to us in our doubts, and still trusts us even though we wrestle with questions. Interestingly enough, in John's gospel the first time we see the full confession of Jesus as *God* (not just messiah) by the disciples is when Jesus has mercy on Thomas' doubt and reveals himself to Thomas (John 20:28).

Jesus has all authority: The moment we find ourself in this passage is immediately after the resurrection. Jesus has left the grave behind and is now in possession of all authority in heaven and on earth. Jesus gives the church the authority to teach, baptize, heal the sick (Matthew 10:8), cast out demons (Mark 3:15), and forgive sins (John 20:22).

"Go and make disciples of all nations": Bible teachers have gone back and forth on whether this is a command to go on mission to other nations and share the gospel, or if this means "*as you go about your life wherever you are,*" share the gospel in that context. The answer to this is: yes, both. Christ may call you to another continent. (There are almost seven thousand unreached people groups (or UPGs) in the world that have never heard the good news of Christ!) Or he may call you to stay in the same place your whole life. Whatever the case, Jesus has called you to join him on mission wherever you are. On campus, off campus, at CSF, at home. But for those of us who don't "go" live as missionaries, *how do we live on mission?*

Disciples don't just have a mission, Disciples ARE the mission: As followers of Jesus, we have a mission to make disciples. And that's not just making brand new disciples, but also encouraging other disciples into spiritual maturity. The mission of Jesus is through the body of followers throughout the world. We don't just have missions to accomplish—like social justice or community service or prayer walks (which are all good things!)—*simply being a Jesus follower is your mission!* You are baptised into life as a disciple and as a disciple-maker.

"I am with you": With his parting words, Jesus reminds his disciples that he is with them always. As they live on mission, his presence is a promise, and we see it fulfilled two ways. First, the Holy Spirit is the presence of God in our lives. Second, a life on mission is not a solitary life, it is a life of community with God and with people. The Church is Christ's body. A missional life is lived out of the overflow of life with God. And we should take comfort in the fact that Christ isn't calling us to *our* work, he's calling us to *his* work.

📖 Quotes & Illustrations

"We must be global Christians with a global vision because our God is a global God."

JOHN R. W. STOTT

"The history of missions is the history of answered prayer."

SAMUEL ZWEMER

"Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't."

JOHN PIPER

"The Great Commission is too big for anyone to accomplish alone and too important not to try to do together."

STEVE MOORE

! Three Main Points

1. A missional life is lived with God. In order to make disciples (like Jesus commanded) you must be a disciple.
2. Disciples don't just have a mission, disciples are the mission. Christ's final command is to bring people in.
3. Jesus promises he is with us. All authority belongs to him, and as we go, we can rest in the fact that our work is his work, and there is victory in Christ.

? Discussion Questions

- What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? What do we learn about people in this passage?
- Do you consider your life to be aligned with Christ's mission? Where/how are you fulfilling

the great commission?

- Is your life with God consistent enough to sustain a missional life?
- What does the life of a disciple look like? What does it include?
- What aspects of discipleship are you not regularly pursuing? What are some practical ways you can take ONE step toward being a better disciple this week?
- A really helpful bible study tool: Whenever you see “therefore” always ask yourself, what is that “therefore” there for? In this case, what is it communicate in verse 19? (Jesus has all authority therefore whatever he tells us carries the weight and importance of the risen King)
- How do you see yourself as a disciple-maker?
- For those of us who don’t “go” live as missionaries, how do we live on mission?
- Is there someone in your life that you feel led to share Jesus with?
- How do you share your faith in a not-weird way?
- Is Jesus really the authority in your life? Or are you?
- God has a heart for the nations, do you share that?
- Have you been baptized? Do you think baptism is important? What does baptism do, if anything? (You can have them read Romans 6 if they bite on this question.)
- Jesus includes doubters in the great commission. That’s weird. How do the Scriptures talk about doubt? Are there things you doubt about your faith? What do you think Jesus’ response to that is? What should your response to that be? (Leader: check out Mark 9, especially verse 24)
- One of Jesus’ commands here is to teach others “to obey everything I have commanded you.” Does obedience have a central role in how you think about life as a disciple? How does helping others toward obedience fit into helping others grow as disciples?

Application & Practice

Pray for the nations: Checkout www.icommittoprayer.com and learn how you can begin praying for the church across the nations! Say a prayer for an unreached people group each day this week.

Make Disciples: This week think of one person you have regular contact with who isn’t an active Christian. Invite that person to Synergy (and then you sit by them). If they go, grab lunch with them on Friday and talk about what they thought about it. Or, if they say no, don’t be awkward. Especially with people we’re good friends with, they’re open to have deep conversations. Ask them if they’re religious (in a casual but serious way), and have a meaningful conversation about it.

Be a Disciple: Honestly evaluate your spiritual life and your daily practices. Identify an aspect of your life that isn’t being shaped by being a disciple (how you use your time or money, your prayer life or lack-there-of, etc.). This week commit yourself to a simple practice—like being generous or starting your day with prayer—that moves in the direction of a life wholly shaped by following Jesus.

Baptism: If you haven't been baptized, pray about whether you really want to follow Christ fully and take the plunge. Talk to a staff member if you're interested.



Going Deeper

How The Great Commission sums up the themes of Matthew by Craig Keener, New Testament professor at Asbury Theological Seminary

Pray for the nations: <https://www.icommittoprayer.com/> (This was in the application section, but it's such a great thing that it bears repeating.)

Watch "What is a UPG?" on Vimeo:
<https://vimeo.com/128750127>

Checkout the Bible Project materials on Matthew:
<https://thebibleproject.com/explore/matthew/>