
REMOVING ALL DOUBT
Matthew 28:18-20

Please follow along as I read.

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."

We come to these verses that are the last verses in the book of Matthew, Matthew's gospel, telling us about the life of Jesus. Jesus is getting ready to ascend, and he gives these instructions to his apostles, to his disciples.

As mentioned before, we are promoting and communicating our new Discipleship courses that are beginning on Wednesday nights. We took last Sunday and we are taking today to talk about the theme, the topic of Discipleship. We just want to make sure that the biblical underpinnings are there, that we understand this is what God has called us to do and why we are giving ourselves toward this effort. So on Wednesday nights there will be something for everyone, every age -- for the babies all the way up through us old people, and there will be adult classes.

The adult classes will start with two six-week courses. The first one is on Scripture. It's on The Doctrine of the Word. Did you know that if you study systematic theology, there are seven major categories or doctrines? Those seven categories (and now I am going to test myself if I can recall those) are:

1. The Doctrine of the Word of God
2. The Doctrine of God
3. The Doctrine of Christ and the Holy Spirit (start praying for me right now)
4. The Doctrine of Man
5. The Doctrine of Salvation or Applied Redemption
6. The Doctrine of the Church
7. The Doctrine of the Future (Last Things)

If you understand those seven major categories, you can see that all doctrine will fit into those seven doctrines. This class begins with the first: The authority of God's Word. It tells us where we get God's Word from and all the various features that we attribute to God's Word. This class will be taught by Adam Greenfield, the second best-looking pastor here at Riverside. I'm sure he is thinking, "Second to Stefan," I'm sure, but...

Class number two will be taught by Navin Gupta with some material by Tim Keller on the gospel. Specifically, when we teach Scripture and we talk about doctrine, we continually come back to the main message of the bible, which is the good news of Jesus Christ. If we take a verse or we take a specific teaching and we apply it apart from this central teaching, we will misunderstand it and misapply it. Everything is informed by the gospel and empowered by the gospel. So this course will seek to lay in a foundation and make those applications. What does the gospel mean when it comes to marriage, parenting, being single, working, being productive, being fruitful? Various applications. So you have two great choices to begin with as we launch our Wednesday night study. We want to do this because we believe the Scripture is very clear that God wants us to be about the task of discipling one another.

This is interesting to me because if you look at the life of Jesus when he walked the earth, he called to himself 12 apostles, and those 12 apostles frequently just flat out got it wrong. In fact, as you read about the life of Jesus, there are many times where they tried to act when they should have been idle, and they were idle when they should have been acting.

There is the account of the feeding of the 5,000. Do you remember the feeding of the 5,000, where Jesus had a mass crowd there before him? 5,000 men, plus women and children. The disciples came to Jesus and said, "Listen, Jesus, this is a problem developing here. Let's send them all away." Do you remember what Jesus said? He said, "No, no, no, we are not going to send them away. You are going to feed them." Then he gave them instructions and performed one of his greatest miracles.

There is the time when the children were brought to Jesus. Individuals were trying to bring children to Jesus and the disciples were like, "Don't bother Jesus," and they were trying to actually keep the children away from Jesus. Then again, Jesus rebuked them and said, "The kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Do not hinder the children from coming to me."

Frequently, they just missed it. On one occasion (this is vividly illustrated) Jesus had fed the 5,000. But there was another feeding miracle (you may not know this) of the feeding of 4,000. So there were these two mass feedings with food leftover. Then Jesus is in the boat with his apostles and he tells them this statement. He wants to teach them about the dangers of legalism, and he makes this statement. He says, “Watch out, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” This is what the apostles do -- they cannot figure out for the life of them what Jesus is talking about -- so they look at one another and they say, “I think he’s upset because we forgot the bread. Did you bring the bread? I thought you were bringing the bread. It’s your fault. Why didn’t you get the bread?” They are arguing with one another about, “Where is the bread?” Then Jesus stops them and says, “Where have you been? I just fed 4,000, I then fed 5,000. We had food leftover. I don’t need bread! I am trying to teach you about the dangers of religious legalism and you are worried about bread!”

Frequently, the disciples just flat out get it wrong. I think if I had been one of the 12 apostles, I would have been happy for Peter. Because you really do get the sense as you are reading through the gospels that they are just not quite on the same page as Jesus, and Peter was always willing to take a risk. He says, “Well, let’s try this.” He would get it wrong. Jesus would rebuke him, and then tell him what they should be doing. So I would just be saying, “Thank you, Peter, for being here because you are going to do something. You will get it wrong then we will find out what we are supposed to be doing.” Really, you’re standing there, you’re in the boat: “Do I walk on the water? Do I not walk on the water? I am personally going to probably not walk on the water, but there’s Peter, stepping out.”

Jesus came to the 12 to teach them one of the most important life lessons that he would impart to them -- the lesson of servant leadership. He wanted to instruct them, and he had been verbally, saying to them over and over: “I don’t lead like other people, and if you are going to follow me, you can’t lead like other people. The last will be first. The least will be the greatest. You will be servant of all. You will not lord authority over. You won’t seek after titles. You won’t seek after position. To be a leader in my kingdom is to be a servant of everyone. Listen, I am going to teach that to you. I am going to wash your feet, the most menial act of service, the lowest service possible.”

So Jesus dresses himself in the clothes of servanthood and he goes to wash their feet. And there is Peter: “Jesus, this isn’t right. I’m going to stop you right now. Don’t do this.” Then Peter, as he

objects, is told by Jesus: “If I don’t wash your feet, you have no part of me.” Then, as only Peter could do, he turns around and says, “Okay, if that’s what this is about, then wash my whole body.” Do you see what’s happening here? He takes the exact teaching of Jesus, which is one of servanthood, of humility, and he uses it to elevate himself, demonstrating that he’s absolutely in the dark about what Jesus is trying to do.

So, when we get to Matthew, Chapter 28, verses 18-20, we are thankful because Jesus absolutely removes all doubt about what we are supposed to be doing. He tells us that the bottom line for us as his followers is: We are to be making disciples. If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, we are called of God to make disciples. In fact, we would say the day will come as a Christian when you will stand before God and he will measure your life by this single command: “Did you give yourself to my call, to my command to go and tell others and to make disciples?”

There’s a reason why the apostles got confused. There are some obvious explanations. First of all, Jesus is God. He is the Son of God. He is infinite, uncreated. Through him all things were created. So we are not surprised on the one hand that the apostles -- finite, limited understanding, as is true of all of us -- they had difficulty comprehending what Jesus was all about.

But there were other reasons that had to do with timing and where they were in history. Jesus was very clear after it all that you could not understand his mission apart from the cross. You see, when they saw Jesus do these fantastic things (and we make the same mistake) -- they saw Jesus feeding thousands upon thousands, healing the sick, setting people free -- they immediately went to places, saying in their own thinking, “Well, Jesus is going to lead a military revolt, and we are going to conquer Rome, and Israel will be free, and we will never be hungry again, and we will rule the earth.” They looked for the kind of personal, military, political leader that we often look for.

Jesus wanted to teach them that he came to do much, much more than that. He came to set us free spiritually, to cleanse us of our sin, to conquer sin and death. He would even do this. On the front end of his ministry, when he would perform a miracle, he would actually tell people -- imagine this -- you’ve been blind your entire life. Jesus just happens along where you are, he heals you, you see, and then he says, “Listen, don’t tell anyone. Just keep it to yourself.” Absolutely impossible to do. And yet, Jesus understood that he needed to define our understanding of who he is, and that the cross and the resurrection -- those events are central to who he is and what he came to do.

Another reason they miss it is because the Spirit of God hadn't been given. Jesus said, "I have to go so that I can pour out my Spirit, and as my followers, my Holy Spirit is going to live within you." Now, as believers, we live on this side of the cross and the resurrection, and the Spirit of God is given. He indwells us as followers of Jesus Christ, and he has given us this very clear instruction. We are commanded to be disciple makers. That's the bottom line. Jesus commands us to be disciple makers. When we read this, we understand that that starts with discipleship itself.

What does it mean to be a disciple? It's interesting. Some groups historically have taken this as the name of their group: the Disciples of Christ. One group for example, the Disciples of Christ, would be a branch of the Church of Christ. They would tend to be a more liberal branch of what we have known historically as the Church of Christ. Texas Christian University - some of you have heard of TCU. My wife happened to go there and graduate from there. It's not really Christian. We used to say that TCU stands for Texas Carnal University. But we didn't mean that -- in a way it sounds disrespectful. I'm just trying to highlight that the relationship there was historical to Christianity, not relational, and that it's a very liberal, private university. It's a great school, but it's not as we would say, "Christian."

So there have been groups that have identified themselves as the Disciples of Christ, but we shouldn't be confused by that. We are not taking that name, but we are taking that role, because that's what we are called to do. It means to be a follower of Jesus. It means to be a pupil, a student, a follower, and biblically one who trusts in Christ.

When Jesus gives this command: "Go therefore and make disciples," look at what the "therefore" points to. Look at the phrase right before that, because Jesus states: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations..." In order to understand the command to go and make disciples, we need to understand who it is that is giving the command.

JC Ryle - preacher, writer - he gives us this description in reference to these verses. He tells us:

Let us embrace this truth reverently and cling to it firmly. Christ is the one who has the keys of death and hell. Christ is the anointed priest, who alone can absolve sinners. Christ is the fountain of living waters, in whom alone we can be cleansed. Christ is the prince and savior, who alone can give repentance and forgiveness of sins. In him, all fullness dwells. He is the way, the door, the light, the life, the shepherd, the altar of refuge. "He who has the Son has

life. He who does not have the Son does not have life.” 1 John 5:12. May we all strive to understand this truth.

When we hear this command, Jesus is emphasizing that he has now conquered sin, conquered death, conquered our enemies. He has gone to the cross. He has paid for our sin. He is getting ready to give the Holy Spirit to all who believe in Christ. Life is found in Jesus Christ alone, and when we receive that life, we are called on by God to give our lives to helping others, to helping them specifically follow Jesus.

There is something that is happening here and I want to describe it this way: that Christianity is paradoxical. There are two tensions that we see work together, two opposites that create a tension. We saw this last week in the teaching on Zacchaeus, from Luke, Chapter 19. On the one hand, Jesus is so embracing. He is so easy to approach. There is a description, where you see Jesus go into Jericho, and the most despised man in the entire town is the one that Jesus picks out to go and save. He goes to his house. He goes into his house, he eats with him, he stays with him, and he is showing us that no person is beyond his reach. No one is beyond salvation. His love reaches out. He is seeking the lost. Individuals who have been rejected by the entire town are welcome with Jesus. They are loved. We focused on the mission of Jesus to seek and to save the lost, that he loves, he cares. We want to find people that we disagree with. We want to listen attentively, to be genuinely curious, to grow, and to express our love for them.

But there is a truth over here that holds that in tension, and that is that when Zacchaeus met Jesus and came to Jesus, he was completely transformed, completely changed. He gave away half of all that he had. A man who had given his life to cheating and lying, to corruption and to hoarding, and greed and accumulation said, “No longer is that my god. No longer are the things of this world my god, but now, Jesus, you are everything,” and immediately there was a change that took place in his life.

When we come to Christ, we see this tension. When we come to church, it’s exactly what we should feel. We should feel: “I am welcome here. I come as I am. Jesus loves me. And I am confronted and challenged.” If a church is not getting both of these right, there is something fundamentally wrong with the knowledge of Jesus in that church. If the worst of sinners cannot come in and say, “I am welcome here to hear the good news,” something is wrong. And if the best of people are not challenged to change and grow, something is wrong. There is a paradox, that we

are constantly comfortable and uncomfortable at the same time. Amen, Brian. Thank you, such wisdom. Please don't stop.

So how did he do it? How does Jesus instruct us to make disciples? He gives a description right here. There are three things we are told to do. The main thing -- make disciples -- now accomplished in three ways:

1. We go
2. We baptize
3. We teach

We go, we baptize, we teach.

#1: We go. Going is both a mindset and an activity. As opposed to a mindset that says, "If you want to hear, then come and ask," there is a mindset, a thinking that we are seeking as Jesus is seeking those who are lost. That mindset, that way of thinking, the way we view other people is accompanied by an activity, a legitimate going. Now, that going may be that you go to your next door neighbor. You go to the cubicle next to you. You go across the hall. Or you go to a village in a remote part of a different nation. Going can take many different forms. It begins with our understanding, our mindset, but it also must contain a literal, legitimate going.

One of the ways that we are going as a church is through the ministry of First Priority. Stefan Bomberger, one of our pastors, is also on staff at First Priority. This is a ministry that targets middle schools and high schools. It has a number of clubs in the tri-county area that are meeting in these schools. We are partnering in a number of ways, but one of the ways that we are partnering is that we have individuals in this church who are in various clubs. Laz Maseda, who is on our board, has helped launch a new club at Silver Lakes Middle School. In their first Mission Week, which is their outreach focus, they had 30 students come out and there were 6 decisions for Christ made that afternoon. Dennis Lugo is also an important part of our church. He is helping lead a group at Coconut Creek High School. Their group grew from about 10 students to over 50 students. There were 15 students that accepted Christ in Mission Week this year. Again, we are trying to re-launch right here, across the street at Somerset. Stefan is also trying to get us into North Broward Academy of Excellence. What we are doing is, we are saying, "We are going to the middle schools and high schools."

My family made the decision -- not that in any way this would be an expectation that anyone else would make this decision -- but we homeschooled our children. You have various options if you are educating: to home school, to go to private school, private Christian school, public school. You need to pray about it. It's an important decision. I can't give you a formula for how it works. I can tell you this: If you are raising children, just pray a lot. Pray and trust God. God is faithful. He gives us children as a blessing. That would be my testimony, one of the greatest blessings in life, in spite of me, and probably because of the grace of my wife.

Children are a blessing. I am illustrating for you that we made a choice about educating our children, but there is a mission field in the middle schools and high schools. That meant we weren't there in the presence of our children. So we are so happy to have partners who are helping us to go. In fact, part of our mission strategy is especially to focus on children.

The Barna Group has just published a survey that tells us that 94% of Christians became Christians before they were 18 years of age. International Bible Society released statistics that said 83% of Christians became Christians before they were 15. What that tells us is that many of us set the path for our lives before we reach into adulthood.

Now, many of you here were saved as adults. You became Christians as adults. But we believe that we have a mandate from God to get the gospel to the next generation -- that it would be securely held, safely held in the hands of the next generation. Several of our ministry partners - One Hope, First Priority - are given to helping us reach children. I'm just trying to illustrate to you that going is a mindset and an activity. Jesus commands us to be disciple makers. He tells us to go.

Secondly, he tells us to baptize. Very simply, "baptize" speaks of two things:

- 1) Conversion
- 2) Community

Let's look at the first: Conversion. You cannot be physically born a Christian. You can be physically born Baptist, Catholic, Jewish, Methodist, but you can't be physically born a Christian. You can be born into a certain tradition, but we must be born again to know Jesus Christ. The Spirit of God comes in and gives us new life. And that new life, Jesus commands, we give public testimony to. Before the community of God, we are baptized as a public statement that Jesus Christ has forgiven me of my sin.

What does conversion look like? It looks like repentance and faith. I confess my sin. I admit my sin before God and I trust in Jesus Christ, because I have come to the understanding that he died on the cross to pay my eternal payment, judgment for my sin. So, we respect people of all traditions. We love people: Christian, non-Christian, Jew, Gentile, black, white, rich, poor, whatever they may be. God sees them as made in his image. They are loved. We, without apology say, “Jesus Christ wants to convert you. He wants to give you new life.” So the first part of baptism is new life. It’s Jesus coming in and making all things new.

The second part is: When you are saved, when you become a Christian, you become a part of a local Christian community. You get involved in a local church. And this, because we are so radically independent, is often hard for us to get our minds around. But it’s so important for us to connect relationally. We need to connect relationally. When we come together in worship, we want it to be about more than a performance. We want to help you worship God and connect to him relationally. We want you to have the opportunity to get into a home group, to get into discipleship groups, to come on Sunday morning faithfully, so that in those three big rocks of church life, you are given opportunity and challenged, just pushed a little bit, happily, toward connecting in vital relationships. Relationships matter. This is God’s plan. This is how God wants us to impact the world and to grow in and of ourselves.

Listen to this quote from David Platt. David Platt writes:

Jesus reminds me that disciples are not mass produced. Disciples of Jesus – genuine, committed, self-sacrificing followers of Christ – are not made overnight. Making disciples is not an easy process. It is trying. It is messy. It is slow, tedious, even painful at times. It is all these things because it is relational. Jesus has not given us an effortless step-by-step formula for impacting nations for his glory. He has given us people, and he has said, “Live for them. Love them, serve them, and lead them. Lead them to follow me, and lead them to lead others to follow me.”

Do you see there? There is that call to connect relationally and to be a disciple maker. In the process, you will multiply the gospel to the ends of the earth.

So, God calls us to go, baptize. We are sharing a basic message of the good news of Jesus Christ, that life is found in his name, calling people to trust in Christ, welcoming them into the community of God.

Third, we are told to teach, to teach all that Jesus commanded. There is something here comprehensive about this call. Many times, our approach to spiritual things can be surface, but we are called here to go deep, lifelong, deep pursuit into the teaching of Jesus Christ.

Our classes on Wednesday night will fall generally under three categories:

1. Biblical Knowledge
2. Bible Doctrine
3. Life Skills

We believe that in these categories we can teach with the hope that you will be enriched in your understanding of Scripture, enriched in your overall understanding of biblical truth, and cultivating, developing life skills.

When we grab ahold of the call of God and the command of Jesus to be a disciple maker, we begin to listen in a different way. We begin to listen with the knowledge: "I have to be able to impart this to other people." We come to a message like this and we say, "Okay, I've got Matthew 28:18-20. My pastor has told me that this is a key passage about what my life purpose is, and that when I meet with someone who just becomes a Christian, I can say, 'Hey, listen, do you know what you are supposed to be doing? Let me show you. Let's go to Matthew 28. Look - main idea - make disciples. You do it in three ways: Go, baptize, teach. Baptize means conversion and church life.'"

I just preached that whole sermon to you in 20 seconds and you are thinking, "Why couldn't you have just done that in 20 seconds?" But the point is I am trying to illustrate to you: If it's transferable, it helps us to understand, "I've got to know this at a deeper level if I am going to help someone else walk in it." God calls us to be disciple makers, which means going, baptizing, teaching.

We end with this. Jesus promises that if we will give ourselves to this effort, he promises us as disciples that he will always be with us. He gives us a promise about his presence to the very end of the age. You know, there was this time when Peter really got it wrong -- maybe the darkest moment of his life, when he denied Jesus three times right before the cross. Part of what made that experience so terrible for Peter was that he promised he would never do anything like that. He did it three times. He did it even though Jesus warned him that he was going to do it.

When Jesus warned him, something really interesting happened. Jesus explained a principle to Peter that he didn't understand at the time, but he later came to understand. Jesus gave him this little parabolic expression. He said, "When the shepherd is struck down, the sheep will scatter." He was telling them: "There is going to be a moment in history when I will carry the sin of the world and the wrath of the Father against sin to the cross and pay its penalty. In that moment I will be separated from you, I will be struck down, and I will be separated from the Father. I will be made sin so that I might pay the penalty of sin." Jesus is saying, "When I am not present, you will scatter." And that's exactly what happened.

When Jesus was arrested and in his trial and in his crucifixion, the disciples ran. In that dark moment, Peter came to understand that he needed Christ, that he could not fulfill the command of Christ apart from Christ, and that the promise of his presence is the promise to empower us and direct us. The cross was necessary. It was necessary so that Jesus could make this promise: "I will be with you to the end of the age. Sin is paid for. Death is conquered." Jesus is saying to you and me: "I have all authority. I have authority over everything that you might fear -- over sin, its penalties, its consequences, its judgment over death itself. I want you to go. I want you to baptize. I want you to teach. When you get it wrong, I will be with you. I will direct you. I am removing all doubt about why you are here and what you are doing. I want you to go and make disciples, and I will be with you to the end of the age." Let's pray.