



This Week in the Word

Forever, O LORD, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens. Ps 119:89.



Call and Commissioning

Study Scripture: Matthew 28:16-20; Acts 1:6-8

Lesson 9, April 27, 2019

Key Verse

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen. Matthew 28:19, 20

Great accomplishments and achievements are often attributed at least in part to the preparation and commitment of the parties involved. Too often when well-meaning and laudable ventures fail we read that the proponents were ill-equipped for the mission. Jesus had completed His earthly mission and was about to return to the Father, however the Gospel of Luke informs us He would continue to do the work He had started (Acts 1:1). As it turned out, He would work through His disciples but their mission, making disciples of 'all' nations seemed near impossible.

Jesus' followers had endured a rollercoaster run of fortune in recent days; from the heights of seeing their Master being publicly acclaimed Israel's Messiah, to the depths of seeing His arrest and then crucifixion within a matter of hours, then rumors of His resurrection, then several bodily appearances.

It would be forty days between Jesus' resurrection and ascension; a time He used to among other things convince His disciples of the reality of His bodily resurrection, the 'cornerstone' of Christian beliefs. Jesus interacted with His disciples providing many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God: In this time Jesus clearly demonstrated the fact that His resurrection was a real bodily resurrection and not just some vague 'spiritual' phenomena. It was necessary to show the disciples, and us, that He was not just alive 'in spirit' or alive in our hearts like a vague memory, but rather was physically raised from the dead and present with them.

The compelling evidence He provided swayed the disciples and their unbelief, fright and doubt now gave way to joyous belief and worship.

It was at the end of this period that He issued what has become known in Christianity as the 'Great Commission' to His followers and all who would follow them. With little fanfare they were commanded to make disciples of all nations. His edict was undergirded by the promise "...I am with you always, even unto the end of the world..." and they would be empowered by the promised Holy Spirit that He, Jesus would send. Thus the disciples, all disciples would be prepared, committed and equipped for the mission. Importantly the command was issued to all His followers and not just to the 'Twelve'.

This last chapter of Matthew is extremely significant for it speaks if only in a few words introducing us to the ascension of Jesus the Lord which will be examined at length in the second section of the Study Scripture.

Note that we are talking of the Lord Jesus Christ who has an unlimited scepter and who has been raised to leadership over all the nations including His nation that had repudiated Him. But note carefully that he still had a little flock which He would use to spread the gospel. It was essential that He assure them of His undying presence, and that He, the person who is now in a position of rulership, would be around them 24 hours a day, and every second of each day.

The risen Savior was with His disciples to announce His complete sovereignty. His nation had rejected him and now the message for His disciples would be that all the nations and not simply Israel were fully available to come to him. The unnatural branches of all Gentiles would now begin to be grafted in to the promises given to Abraham. Clearly a predominantly Gentile church would emerge but the book of Acts insisted clearly that the gospel should first be preached to the Jews and then to the Greeks, the other name used for Gentiles.

We know therefore that the gospel of Jesus Christ is a fit subject for evangelism to the Jewish people.

Note that when Jesus was speaking to the disciples He is always in a teaching mode, for these disciples had a great deal of difficulty to believe in the resurrection. He is trying to push them off of the old way of thinking to the next level and so He now had to have them live in His invisible presence and not His visible presence. He is trying to prepare them for this new set of circumstances.

Therefore note the stress on the fact that all authority has been given to Him; He is always going to be with them, and that He has unrestricted sovereignty. As the Son of God, the King, the Messiah, sovereignty belonged to Him and He had authority over all flesh as well as over the angelic hosts. They should therefore go on their mission without any fear.

We should also remember that the ascension of Jesus is the final step in His exaltation, for now at His ascension He is seated at the right hand of the Father.

Call to Ministry

The ascension also marks the starting point of Jesus his heavenly ministry on behalf of the people of God. He had completed the work of redemption in His shed blood and so now He was prepared to bring His little flock successfully into the presence of the Father.

The passage in the book of Acts now brings us to the reality of the ascended Jesus living in heaven. He would now be able to send the Holy Spirit to make possible the work of spreading the gospel.

Note that we now know the destination of the risen Christ. We and the disciples know where Jesus is in glorified human nature because He is present in heaven in glorified human form standing as the representative of men who believed in Him.

So our last Study Scripture begins to disclose or make clear our position in this Season, for we are buried with Him, raised with Him, and seated with Him according to Ephesians 2.

The Lord Jesus Christ therefore has ascended and is in the position to send the gift of the Spirit so that the Spirit will indwell all those that belong to Jesus and give gifts to all those that belong to Christ. The inauguration of Jesus' High Priestly Ministry will now begin immediately and we will serve as priests under the Great High Priest.

We note therefore that He went all in bodily form and will return in physical form from the particular plays from which He left when He returns to restore the Kingdom to Israel. So says the book of the prophet Zechariah.

Today's Lesson Text presents two accounts of Jesus' giving His disciples instructions for continuing His ministry in His absence. The first, from Matthew twenty-eight, comes immediately after the passage from last week's study. That passage recounted events surrounding the resurrection of Jesus and the resurrection itself. All that took place in and near Jerusalem. A change in geographical context is introduced, however, by the transition noted in Matthew 28:16, which opens today's lesson.

The second account comes from the book of Acts which is Luke's record of the history of the first-century church. Luke had written from a different perspective from Matthew and so the book of Acts continues smoothly from his description of the final teaching of Jesus to the disciples in the book of Luke and an additional set of teaching to the disciples who wanted answers to what would happen now immediately before His ascension to heaven.

The founding of the church (Acts 2) was a commission or charge given to the apostles before Jesus' ascension near Bethany (Luke 24:50, 51). This section of our study will deal with Luke's summary exposition of Jesus' final teaching and instruction to the disciples before His ascension. It puts the reader in the same place as the Apostles and the disciples, as being responsible for the proclamation of what you now know, concerning the person and work of Christ. Their task was to "witness"; preaching the good news about repentance for the forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name.

The geographical contexts of our two lesson-segments are different, but the time frame is the same. Both occur during the forty days of Acts 1:3. This period begins at Jesus resurrection and ends before Pentecost.

Noteworthy, it was a lifestyle that would be taught and modelled by all disciples. This is the overarching purpose of the Church. The response of the early disciples is the standard for all succeeding generations of Christians, for not many years after we read that they had ‘turned the world upside down’.

Let us carefully read the Text and note the essentials of making disciples and the fact that this vanguard group was by and large comprised of Galileans, very ordinary people.

THE TEXT

Verse 16. The location of our first lesson-segment is in accordance with the instructions from both the angel at the tomb and the resurrected Jesus himself, (Matthew 28:7, 10).

With Judas no longer among their number, the eleven disciples make the multi-day trip back to Galilee. The text does not tell us the specific mountain for the rendezvous or precisely what time this meeting occurred.

Verse 17. Exactly how long after Jesus’ resurrection this appearance takes place is also not clear. The first appearances are recorded in Matthew 28:9, 10; Mark 16:9–14; Luke 24:13–32; and John 20:19–25. The next recorded appearance was “after eight days” (John 20:26–29). Following that was an appearance to seven of the eleven by the Sea of Galilee (John 21:1–23). The appearance to over five hundred believers recorded in 1 Corinthians 15:6 may have occurred between that of John 21 and the one in the text before us—much uncertainty exists.

But some doubted... despite the previous appearances of Jesus, doubts persist. It would seem by this point that the eleven disciples were fully convinced that Jesus had risen from the dead. Therefore the group gathered here in Galilee may include other followers of Jesus, some of whom have not yet seen Him since His resurrection. One theory is that this occasion is also that of 1 Corinthians 15:6, just noted.

Note that the word used for “doubted” in Greek means “hesitated”, and so it is clear that some of them had unresolved questions about how they should respond to Him. It was clear that the resurrection of Jesus did not answer all the questions that remained in the minds of the disciples about Him. Their minds were probably still fixed on the old nationalistic Jewish themes about Messiah and what He would do when He came. Since Jesus was not apparently about to begin His reign over Rome and the Gentile nations it is likely that there would be unanswered questions that they were important to nationalistic Jews.

Verse 18. ... Jesus came and spake ... Jesus drew closer to them however, probably to have the doubters make up their minds, that He was really their old Master. It is still the right response to doubt, hear the Lord speak, go to the Scriptures to combat doubt.

... All power is given unto me ... such a sweeping statement reflects Jesus' conquest of death (Revelation 1:18). The word in the original language behind the translation power is also translated "authority" in other contexts (Matthew 7:29; 8:9). We may think of power as the ability to do something, while authority is the right to do something. Thus the two ideas are closely related, and Jesus has both in an absolute sense. Indeed, the word all dominates this section of three verses. There is nothing partial or halfway about anything here!

This has been clearly implied on many occasions throughout His ministry. His teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, for example, overturned commonly held views with the declaration, "But I say unto you ..." (Matt. 5:22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44). He had exercised power over disease, nature, and death. Now His own resurrection proves the claim beyond a shadow of a doubt. And what He claims is what He possessed in the beginning (John 1:1-3).

The fact that this power is given to Jesus implies that the heavenly Father, having sent the Son (Galatians 4:4), is the one who has given the Son all power and authority. What is implied here is unmistakable in Matthew 11:27; John 3:35; 13:3; 17:2; Ephesians 1:20-22; and Philippians 2:9-11.

Verse 19. Jesus' disciples should go and make disciples because Jesus now has universal authority. He gave them a new universal mission in keeping with His new universal authority. Previously He had limited their work to Israel (10:1-8; cf. 15:24). Now He sent them into all the world. They could go confidently knowing that Jesus has sovereign control over everything in heaven and on earth (Rom. 8:28).

We are told that in the Greek text there is one imperative verb, "make disciples" (Gr. *matheteusate*), modified by three participles, "going," "baptizing," and "teaching." This does not mean that we should make disciples wherever we may happen to go. The participle "going" is not just circumstantial, but it has some imperatival force. In other words, Jesus commanded His disciple to reach out to unreached people to make disciples, not just to make disciples among those with whom they happened to come in contact.

The term "disciples" meant "learners." The Bible emphasizes decisions and lifestyle faith. The key to evangelism is discipleship. Discipleship must start with a repentant faith profession and continue in the same way unto obedience and perseverance.

Making disciples involves bringing people into relationship with Jesus as pupils to teacher. It involves getting them to take His yoke of instruction upon themselves as authoritative (11:29), accepting His words as true, and submitting to His will as what is right. A good disciple is one who listens, understands, and obeys Jesus' instructions (12:46-50). Disciples of Jesus must duplicate themselves in others.

The "all nations" (Gr. *panta ta ethne*) in view are all tribes, nations, and peoples, including Israel

(Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18). The phrase does not mean Gentiles exclusive of Jews. Matthew hinted at the Gentiles' inclusion in God's plan to bless humanity throughout his Gospel (1:1; 2:1-12; 4:15-16; 8:5-13; 10:18; 13:38; 24:14; et al.). Jesus' disciples should make disciples among all people without distinction.

Baptizing and teaching are to characterize making disciples. Baptizing is to be into the name of the Triune God (1 Cor. 12:4-6; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 4:4-6; 2 Thess. 2:13-14; 1 Pet. 1:2; Rev. 1:4-6). The "into" (Gr. eis) suggests coming into relationship with God as a disciple. Baptism indicates both coming into covenant relationship with God and pledging submission to His lordship. Obviously water baptism rather than Spirit baptism is in view (3:6, 11, 13-17).

This baptism differed from John the Baptist's baptism. This one is universal whereas John's baptism was for Israelites. This baptism rests on the finished work of Jesus Christ, but John's baptism prepared people for Jesus' person and work.

Jesus placed Himself on a level with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

"It is one thing for Jesus to speak about his relationship with God as Son with Father (notably 11:27; 24:36; 26:63-64) and to draw attention to the close links between himself and the Holy Spirit (12:28, 31-32), but for 'the Son' to take his place as the middle member, between the Father and the Holy Spirit, in a threefold depiction of the object of the disciple's allegiance is extraordinary."

"The Trinity of God is confessedly a great mystery, something wholly beyond the possibility of complete explanation. But we can guard against error by holding fast to the facts of divine revelation: that (1) with respect to His Being or essence, God is one; (2) with respect to His Personality, God is three; and (3) we must neither divide the essence, nor confuse the Persons."

The early Christians evidently did not understand the words "in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" as a baptismal formula that they needed to use whenever they baptized someone (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5; Rom. 6:3). Jesus apparently meant that His disciples were to connect others with the triune God of the Bible in baptism. Jesus did not specify a mode of baptism, though immersion was common in Judaism and is consistent with the meaning of the Greek word baptizo, "to immerse or submerge." His command to baptize disciples seems to rule out baptism for infants and others who cannot consciously understand and agree with what baptism signifies.

Baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Making disciples is characterized, in part, by baptizing those being taught. The meaning and significance of baptism are addressed elsewhere (Acts 2:38; 19:4, 5; Romans 6:3, 4; Galatians 3:27; Colossians 2:12; 1 Peter 3:21; etc.). The stress here is submission and allegiance to the Father, ... the Son, and ... the Holy Ghost.

Call to Ministry

Obedience to this command is seen in Acts 8:36–38; 9:18; 16:33; 18:8; etc. But some students wonder why Peter will command baptism only “in the name of Jesus Christ” on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:38) and later (10:48). The fact that Peter does so indicates that he does not see a contradiction. It is clear from Jesus’ teaching that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are in complete unity with one another (John 16:12–15; compare 1 Peter 1:2). To baptize in the name of Jesus must include the other two.

One writer opines: “Some Christian fellowships struggle over the flexibility (or inflexibility) of Bible language. How can baptism administered “in Jesus’ name” be as valid as baptism done “in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost”? The answer may lie in the category of figurative language known as synecdoche. That is a figure of speech where mention of a part is intended to refer to the whole or vice versa. A serious acceptance of biblical truth must not require us to exercise a “one size fits all” method of interpretation to every verse in the Bible. When Jesus says “I am the door” in John 10:7, He is literally a door in the sense of being a portal or barrier between two areas. He is not a door in a literalistic sense of being made from wood and swinging on iron hinges!”

Verse 20. ... observe all things ... Notice that "what we teach" is not simply facts about Jesus, but obedience to all of His teachings. Christian maturity involves

1. a repentant faith profession
2. a life of Christ-like living
3. a growing doctrinal understanding

And, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

Jesus concludes what we call the Great Commission with the assurance of His presence at all times. Matthew mentions toward the beginning of his Gospel how Jesus’ birth fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14, that a virgin will give birth to a son who will be called Emmanuel (Matthew 1:22, 23), meaning “God with us.” Now Matthew concludes his record with Jesus’ assurance that He will be with His followers as they carry out the task He gives them.

... to the end of the age... this refers to the two Jewish ages and was a reference to the Second Coming or consummation of the Kingdom of God.

(Acts 1:6–8)

In the first recorded words of Jesus in the book of Acts, He tells His apostles not to leave Jerusalem until the promised baptism of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4, 5). Our lesson picks up at this point. The forty-day period of Acts 1:3 is coming to a close.

The key to the apostles’ successful fulfillment of Jesus’ commission was their baptism with, and consequent indwelling by, the Holy Spirit. Without this divine enablement, they would only have been able to follow Jesus’ example, but with it, Jesus could literally continue to do His work and teach His words through them. Consequently their preparation for the

baptism of the Spirit was very important. Luke recorded it to highlight its foundational significance.

Verse 6. ... When they therefore were come together ... therefore connects the apostles' question with Jesus' teachings concerning "the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3) and His promise that they will be "baptized with the Holy Ghost" (1:5).

they asked of him The tense here means either repeated action in past time or the initiation of an act. Apparently these disciples had asked this many times.

... wilt thou at this time ... the Old Testament associated Spirit baptism with the beginning of the messianic (millennial) kingdom (Isa. 32:15- 20; 44:3-5; Ezek. 39:28-29; Joel 2:28—3:1; Zech. 12:8-10). It was natural, therefore, that the disciples would ask if that kingdom was about to begin, in view of Jesus' promise that the Spirit would baptize them in a few days.

'This time' refers to 'not many days from now' (v. 5).

In the Septuagint, the term "restoration" (Gr. *apokatastaseos*) technically refers to God's political restoration of Israel (Ps. 16:5; Jer. 15:19; 16:15; 23:7; Ezek. 16:55; 17:23; Hos. 11:11). The Gentiles had taken the Jews' kingdom from them, which occurred with Nebuchadnezzar's conquest in 586 B.C. Clearly the messianic kingdom is in view.

Verse 7. Jesus had previously warned His disciples not to let themselves be distracted by a fascination with setting dates for His return (Matthew 24:36—44; 25:13). Here the issue is the establishment of His kingdom, but the warning remains the same: God is the ultimate timekeeper. Information such as this has been withheld from humanity.

Note, Jesus did not correct the disciples for believing that the messianic kingdom would come. He only corrected their assumption that they could know when the kingdom would begin and that the kingdom would begin in a few days.

Verse 8. Rather than trying to figure out when the kingdom would come, the disciples were to give their attention to something different, namely, worldwide witness. Moreover, the disciples would receive divine enablement for their worldwide mission

The power promised was not to enable the apostles to live godly lives, though the Holy Spirit does enable believers to do that. What is promised to the apostles is the power to fulfil their mission, that is, to speak, to bear oral testimony, and to perform miracles and in general act with authority. This power is given through the Spirit, and conversely the Spirit in Acts may be defined as the divine agency that gives this power.

One writer notes: "They were now to be witnesses, and their definite work was to bear testimony to their Master; they were not to be theologians, or philosophers, or leaders, but witnesses. Whatever else they might become, everything was to be subordinate to the idea of personal testimony. It was to call attention to what they knew of Him and to deliver His message to mankind. This special class of people, namely, disciples who are also witnesses, is therefore very prominent in this book. Page after page is occupied by their testimony, and the key to this feature is found in the words of Peter: 'We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard' (4:20)."

Many students of the Bible have noted that this sequence of places provides an outline of the gospel's progress as recorded by Luke in the book of Acts. The gospel is first preached by Peter in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost. The impact of that message is immediate as 3,000 are led to become followers of Jesus (Acts 2:41).

Call to Ministry

Later the movement expands into Judaea (the region in which Jerusalem is located) and Samaria. This is spurred by the persecution initiated by Saul, which forces the believers out of Jerusalem (Acts 8:1).

Taking the message unto the uttermost part of the earth begins with the conversion of Cornelius and his household (the first Gentile converts). It is furthered by the missionary journeys of Paul.

At the conclusion of Acts, Paul is in Rome—a location which at that time represented “the uttermost part.” It marked a goal that Paul had been keenly intent on reaching (Acts 19:21; 23:11). The gospel was already there before Paul came. Of course, Paul was always thinking of new frontiers, such as Spain (Romans 15:23, 24) to which the gospel might be taken (compare 2 Corinthians 10:15, 16).

CONCLUSION

Jesus wants His followers to take His message of salvation to the entire world. That is to be the top priority for the apostles as the Day of Pentecost approaches. It must still be the church’s top priority today. presence will be exchanged for His visible and eternal presence.