

## **Introduction**

“Church growth” is an area of study and theory that has become popular in the last 40 or 50 years. Courses and majors in seminaries have been given to this topic, and countless books have been published which endeavor to demonstrate how to grow a church. Most of the methods involved concentrate on people—what they are like and what they like. The idea is if we can make the church attractive to people, they will come and fill it. Hopefully getting them in the door of the church will also get them to Christ.

There are problems with the church growth mentality. But put very simply, Jesus Christ said that HE will build his church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. So when we wonder about how to grow the church, all the experts in the world relying on marketing strategies and such really are the last people with whom we should consult. Our first question should be, “Has Jesus himself said anything about how He will grow his church?” Where we come this morning in Matthew brings us face-to-face with the fact that Jesus HAS INDEED spoken to this issue. And he has specifically addressed the role of his followers in this enterprise. So let’s give ourselves to grasp what he says here.

[Read Text and Pray]

In this text Jesus issues a charge to his disciples. The gravity of the charge is manifested graphically. These verses serve as a sort of “therefore” to the rest of the book of Matthew. Matthew has spent the entire book demonstrating that Jesus is the Messiah. He fulfills OT predictions one text after another. And here at the end we have seen that his conquering work overcame sin and death. He died bearing the wrath of God for sinners and rose victorious from the tomb. So what? This paragraph answers the “so what?” question with the authoritative voice of Christ himself. The main idea of the text is this: Jesus instructs and charges the church to fulfill its central mission. He tells us what the central mission is and he tells us to do it. It is a mission that lasts until he returns. The text unfolds four aspects of the commission.

### **I. The Appearance of Jesus (16-17)**

A. Jesus appeared before the assembly on the mountain in Galilee to which Jesus had directed them. Keep in mind that the crucifixion and the resurrection occurred in Jerusalem about 75 miles south of Galilee. But Galilee was where most of the most of Jesus’s ministry took place. It was the area in which most of his disciples lived. It was a 4-5 day walk from Jerusalem to there. Before he was crucified, Jesus had told his disciples that after he was raised he would go before them to Galilee. When the angel spoke to the women at the tomb, he instructed them to tell Jesus’s disciples that he was going before them to Galilee. And then Jesus, when he greeted those women, urged them to go tell his brothers to GO to GALILEE, and there they would SEE him.

After Jesus was raised, he appeared to disciples there in Jerusalem over the period of about a week. Then he also appeared to them later in Galilee on the beach when a group of them went fishing. But from what Matthew tells us, we discern that this meeting on the mountain was a crucial component of Jesus’s plan for preparing the disciples for their mission after he ascended to heaven. The REPEATED instruction to go to a meeting on a mountain in Galilee demonstrates that this was indeed a momentous occasion. Also you have the fact that this meeting took place on a mountain. It takes us back to Mt. Sinai where God gave the law and to Mt. Carmel where the Lord displayed that he is

God by answering in fire. We should be reminded that when Jesus preached his great sermon, he went up on the mountain. And when he was transfigured, he led Peter, James and John up a high mountain. So these disciples had to know this was an important meeting.

The eleven went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. Though Matthew tells us the eleven disciples went there, the significance and location of the meeting suggest that this may well be the appearance to more than 500 brothers to which Paul refers in 1 Corinthians 15. Its momentous importance would surely suggest that as well.

B. It is to be noticed that they went where they were told and THERE they SAW Jesus. It is a subtle lesson but important nonetheless. If you want to see Jesus, if you want to experience him in your life, go where he tells you. Do what he tells you.

C. When the brothers saw Jesus, they did exactly what they should have done. They worshiped him. Worship on the mountain marks an important tie to the commission the disciples are to receive. Worship is the preparation of the heart for usefulness in the mission of serving God. The worship of Christ from the hearts of the disciples prepared them to receive and obey the commission Jesus was shortly to give them. It was likewise with Isaiah. The Lord appeared to him as in the temple with the angels singing holy, holy, holy. He was overtaken with awe at the Lord and gasped at his own sin. The Lord responded in grace taking his guilt away. Then the Lord said, "Whom shall I send and who will go for us?" And Isaiah replied, "Here I am! Send me!" And the Lord said, "Go!"

Listen, right worship of the Lord is the ground in which the Lord asks, "Whom shall I send?" and to which his people respond, "Here I am! Send me!" It starts with a high and lofty view of God which is itself uncomfortable because of our sin. But it is a great and high view of God that emboldens us to serve and obey whatever the cost. We do not draw people to the true God by making them comfortable with a diminished view of who he is. We draw people to God by exhibiting to them his greatness and our amazement and awe of his true glory.

Matthew tells us that some doubted. Those were probably of the eleven but some of those who were seeing Jesus post-resurrection for the first time. The honesty of Matthew reinforces our confidence in trusting his account. There are often some who doubt among us. We should acknowledge it and with patience strengthen and encourage them.

## **II. The Authority of Jesus (18)**

A. Jesus is the Messiah. This bedrock truth is what Matthew has been laboring to show us. Jesus is the deliverer and redeemer of God's people. The Jews were looking for a mighty deliverer to come and throw off the power of Rome. They were unimpressed with Jesus because his focus was not on Rome but on righteousness, the heart of man, and the tyranny of death and the devil. Boy, did they miss it! Jesus is a far greater conqueror than they could imagine. As he declares to the gathered throng, "ALL authority IN HEAVEN AND on earth has been given to me." The Romans—they are NOTHING! The nations are but a drop from a bucket. Of course Jesus would throw off the Romans in due time and every other enemy nation as well. But at present he has already thrown off the power and authority of Satan and death!

B. Jesus has been granted ALL Authority. Let's talk about the meaning of authority. Authority is the right to command, compel, and to judge. It is based on the possession of superior power and position. It is both the right to rule and the power to enforce. Jesus has ALL authority and power over everything in heaven and on earth. Nothing is going to be able to overcome him. And every

molecule is responsible to obey his commands. I like the way the Apostle Paul says it in Ephesians 1. He is praying that the saints will know the immeasurable greatness of the power of God toward us who believe. He says, that power is "according to the working of [God's] great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, FAR above ALL rule and authority and power and dominion, and EVERY name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. And he put ALL things in subjection under his feet and gave him as head over ALL things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all."

There is nothing outside the realm of that which is subjected to Christ. All power and authority and dominion belong to him. You know what that means? Well, for one, it means he has the absolute right to tell the world what to do. But in particular, he has the right to tell his church what to do. He is our commander. All things are under his feet and he is the head of the church. He is our God. He is our sovereign Lord and King. Obeying him is not optional; it is obligatory. What he commands is not up for negotiation or debate. Our only options are to submit or to rebel. And with his authority now stated, Jesus issues a mission mandate to the church of which he is head. We must listen with all our being.

### **III. The Authorization of the Church (19-20a)**

A. Here is the commission: 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." The major translations all get it slightly off. Literally, what verse 19 says is this, "having gone, therefore, make disciples of all nations, baptizing, and teaching."

In other words there is one focal command. The focal command is to "make disciples." The other action words in the commission describe important features of what is involved in obeying the focal command. We will focus first on the command to make disciples.

Making disciples is what Jesus did in his ministry. He issued a call that men would come and follow him. Making disciples starts with a call to people to come and follow Christ. And following Christ requires self-denial; it demands the sacrifice of self. Jesus told those who would come that the way of following him is not easy but very difficult. It involves in effect hating everyone in comparison to the supreme love they have for him. Following Christ is like taking up a cross every day; it is losing one's life for Christ's sake. And this is the way of salvation; it is the way which leads to life.

It is clear that becoming a disciple of Jesus is no less than what it means to be a Christian, to be saved from God's wrath, to be redeemed. Becoming a disciple is not elevating ourselves to a higher level among the people of God. Being a disciple is the only level there is among Christ's redeemed. As MacArthur says, "A person who is not Christ's true disciple does not belong to him and is not saved. When a person genuinely confesses Christ as Lord and Savior, he is immediately saved, immediately made a disciple, and immediately filled with the Holy Spirit. Not to be Christ's disciple is therefore is not to be Christ's at all."

The Rich Young man who came kneeling before Jesus is an example of a person who tried to have salvation without Christ's lordship. He wanted eternal life without submission to Christ's directives. Jesus made it plain that to have eternal life, one must not merely have mental assent to certain facts but must approach the Lord with a heart that fully trusts in him and disowns oneself and one's possessions in order to follow him as his disciple. So making disciples involves preaching the gospel and growing in Christ's likeness those who turn from sin and trust in Jesus. Are there those among us today who need to make the initial step in following Christ of coming to him with your sins and

trusting him to save you? O, today as we are focusing on the commission of the church, there is no more fitting occasion for you to turn from your sin and yourself and instead of going away grieved as was the rich young man, not ever going away from Jesus but rejoicing in his great and glorious salvation.

In calling followers, Jesus told them that he would make them to be fishers of men. This is the work of discipleship—fishing for men who will hear the gospel and also take up their crosses and follow Christ. And part of following Christ is then calling others to follow. Part of becoming a disciple is becoming a maker of other disciples. It is more than evangelism, but it starts with evangelism. It is more than telling others about Christ, but it starts with telling others about Christ. When Paul and Barnabas were together in Derbe, Acts 14:21 says that they “preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples.” Disciples of Christ are called to get in on the mission, and the mission is to make disciples.

Furthermore, the commission reveals that following Christ and making disciples has a worldwide trajectory. The purpose of the suffering of Jesus was to bring into heaven with him people from every tribe and tongue and nation. It was always God’s plan to save people from all over the world. Discipleship does not just focus on people who look like me and talk like me but also on those who look different and who talk differently, with different skin tones, and cultural backgrounds, and who speak different languages.

The great commission exhibits God’s opinion of what our world calls racism. He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth. He commands all people everywhere to repent. So he wants his message to go to them all, and he has designed to save people from out of every one of these people groups—red and yellow, black and white, rich, poor, cultured and barbarian. When we look at the world, we should not see the outward distinctions but rather the inward commonality. The world consists of lost people who need Christ and who need to become his disciples.

B. Now, Jesus designates three important aspects involved in making disciples: Going, Baptizing, and Teaching. Going stresses that you do not just sit there. The great commission is not “Y’all come” but “Go tell.” It is like the angel telling the women who came to the tomb, “Go quickly and tell his disciples.” Don’t just sit there. Don’t cloister yourself. Get out there and get in the midst of the world and reach out to it with the glorious gospel. It is true for each of us, and it is for us together.

C. Next, Jesus says, “Baptizing.” When folks become disciples of Jesus, we are to baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. The word baptize means to immerse. And that is what Jesus is talking about. The act of submitting to water baptism is not an act which contributes to salvation. No, the order is to make disciples and to baptize them. Baptism is a public profession of faith in Christ. It is the initial way a follower tells the world they belong to Jesus. It is an act of obedience which expresses the beautiful reality of our union with Christ. By faith we are joined with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection. By our union with Christ we are new creatures; we are free from sin’s dominion. We are alive to God. Baptism portrays these realities for us to embrace and shouts out loudly to the world that we belong to Christ and we have entered into a relationship with the Father (we are his children) and the Son (we are saved by His work) and the Spirit (we are made alive and led by Him). This ordinance is so serious that to refuse to take part in it is to disobey the Lord.

Now, it baffles me how some extreme dispensationalists assert that water baptism is no longer called for. I just want to point out that I am sure they do not believe Jesus's promise of his presence ever runs out. That promise lasts until the end of the age. The promise of his presence is there to assure his followers as they are making disciples, as they are going and baptizing and teaching. So the promise coincides with the commission. Hence, the context indicates that until we come to the end of the age, we should be making disciples AND BAPTIZING them. If you are a follower who has not been baptized, it is time. It is time to submit, and it is time to openly declare to the world that you belong to Jesus.

D. The third critical aspect of making disciples is teaching. Making disciples means teaching them to carefully observe ALL that Jesus commanded. Bottom lines here are teaching and obeying. Disciples of Jesus want to learn of him and obey him. That is what a disciple does. That is his call to follow—teaching, learning, obeying. True saving faith is a faith marked by the drive and desire to obey Christ. Hebrews 5:9 declares that Jesus is “the source of eternal salvation to all who OBEY him.” Romans 6:17 describes conversion as becoming “obedient from the heart to” gospel teaching. So making disciples involves teaching and obeying Christ.

Do you have a heart to know Christ better, know his commands better, and obey them? That is what a disciple does.

#### **IV. The Assurance Provided by Jesus (20b)**

What would be possible if we engaged in the effort to which Jesus is calling in our own strength? The good and glorious news is that the Lord does not just unload a commission on his disciples and walk away and leave us to our own devices and to our own strength. In fact the assurance that Jesus shares here at the conclusion of his appearance is the most mind-blowing, yet critical, aspect of the whole thing. It starts with the word BEHOLD. This is that word which calls for wonder and amazement. It urges us to stop and consider something that is staggering and important. And here it is.

Jesus says to his disciples that as they engage in this endeavor to make disciples, he himself is WITH his disciples ALWAYS. I, the Lord, in whom is invested all authority in heaven and on earth, yes, me—I am WITH YOU ALWAYS. As Jesus assures his disciples of his continuous presence, he supplies what is necessary for our courage and confidence. He supplies also the power needed to accomplish the work.

I often remind you of Paul's approach when he went to Corinth. He refused to resort to human schemes and fleshly approaches in seeking to win the lost there. No, he simply preached Christ and depended upon the Spirit so that their faith would not rest upon the wisdom of men but in the power of God. Listen, no amount of human power can convert a soul. You can squeeze out the truth and increase the fluff and the entertainment and get people inside a church building, but that will not get them to Christ. It may just make them more comfortable in their lostness. Getting people to Christ requires the work of God. That is why the presence of Christ is so essential and so assuring. It promises results and increases our courage and strength.

Such was the assurance given to Joshua as Israel stood poised to enter the land of promise. Moses had died and the weight of responsibility lay upon the shoulders of his assistant. And the Lord promised that HE was giving the land to the people. But they had to go get it. They had to go enter the land and take it. And the Lord spoke to Joshua. He said, “Just as I was WITH Moses, so I will be WITH you. I will not leave you or forsake you. Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause

this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them. Only be strong and courageous.”

The conquest to which we as Christ’s disciples have been called is not unlike that to which Joshua was commissioned. We are to go into the world. And we are to seek to conquer souls for Christ by the preaching of the gospel. They will only come as God gives them to us. We totally lack power and strength to bring it about. But we must go and we must tell. And we must rely upon the power of God. We are powerless in this conquest, but here is the assurance: Jesus says to us, “I will be with you always. I will not leave you or forsake you. Not through the end of the age.”

This is the hope of the Christ-follower. No matter where we go. No matter what we face. In the midst of celebration of many coming to faith or in the midst of persecution from the worst of Christ’s enemies, he will NEVER leave. He is there to work; to assure; to give hope and strength; and to bless. Praise God he never leaves!

### **Conclusion**

There are a number of incredible purposes for the church. We are to worship and fellowship and encourage. But there is one central mission and that is to make disciples. Let us not forget it.

### **Prayer**

### **Benediction**

Now may the Lord to whom belongs All Authority, strengthen you for the task to which he calls us—to go into all the world and make disciples of Jesus to the glory of God!