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Matthew 28:18 - 28:20



Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

In this presentation, Steve Gregg discusses the importance of embracing Christ as our Lord and Savior and following Him as the rightful King. He emphasizes the significance of discipleship and how we have been called to go and disciple nations, not just make decisions for Christ. Additionally, Gregg discusses the importance of baptism and how it symbolizes our identification with Christ as our leader and transfer from darkness to light. He concludes by stating our great task as disciples: to change the world by making disciples of all nations with the help of the indwelling power of Christ.

Transcript

This is our final session in our long series of talks about the Gospel of Matthew. The final session because we now come to the very end of the Gospel of Matthew, Matthew 28, and we are looking at the Great Commission, which is the command given by Christ to his disciples in the last verses of the Gospel of Matthew. This commission really begins with a statement rather than a command, and the command that he gives is based upon that statement.

The statement is found in Matthew 28, 18, where Jesus said, All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. He says, Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you, and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Now, the beginning statement of this announcement is that all authority has been given to Christ in heaven and earth, and that means that his Father has given him a position of absolute authority and dominion at the right hand of God, and that speaks of the obligation of all people to come under his authority.

If God has put him in authority, that means he's given him the right to be the ruler over all, and if you and I refuse to voluntarily come under that rule, then we are in rebellion against that choice that God has made to put him in charge. And so, all who do not embrace Christ and follow him as Lord and Savior are in rebellion against the rightful king, and who has made him the rightful king? None other than his Father and our Father, our Creator, and ultimately our Judge. It behooves us to acknowledge the one

that God has put in authority over us, and it is because of that that this command follows.

He says, go therefore. Now, therefore suggests that this command is based upon the truth expressed earlier. Because of this, that's what therefore means, because of this.

In other words, because Christ has all the right to rule in heaven and earth, we need to go throughout heaven and earth, as it were, where he has the right to rule, and to inform the inhabitants that they have another king, one Jesus, that there is one that is now in charge. You see, the Bible seems to indicate that before Christ came, the entire world was subject to the wrong authority, to Satan, actually. In fact, it says in 1 John chapter 5, the whole world lies in the wicked one.

However, with the coming of Christ and the giving him of all authority in heaven and earth, it is now clear that the devil has no authority at all, because if Christ has all authority, then there can be none left to give to somebody else like, say, the devil. And that means that the devil is not an opposing and rival legitimate authority to Christ. He is one who simply refuses to submit to the authority of Christ, and is therefore a rebel, and those who follow the devil rather than Christ are simply rebels as well.

Now, the commission to the disciples is to bring the rebellious, who are rebelling against the authority of Christ, under his proper rule. This is expressed in three ways. First, he says, go and make disciples of all nations.

Now, what does it mean to make disciples? It's clear that all nations, not only Israel, is included in this kingdom that is under the Messiah. You see, that is a very important thing. When Jesus says, all nations, he is expanding his rule beyond that which was acknowledged in Old Testament times.

You see, Israel was recognized as the kingdom of God in the Old Testament. God had said to Israel when he brought them out of the land of Egypt. In Exodus 19, verses 5 and 6, he says that if you keep my covenant and obey my voice, then you'll be a peculiar treasure to me and a kingdom of priests.

That is, those who obey Christ or who obey God in the Old Testament were his kingdom, a kingdom of priests unto him, and he was therefore their ruler. And that was a promise made to Israel. But now, the authority of Christ, his kingdom, is to be extended beyond Israel to all nations.

And it is not simply a matter of preaching good news. That is part of the commission, but that's not part of the commission stated here. In Mark 16, we read, go and preach the gospel, that is the good news to every creature.

But that was a different occasion and a different command. This one is about making disciples. What is a disciple, anyway? Go and make disciples out of all nations.

You know, I think the church in general has been very poor at the fulfillment of this commission. In fact, the church has been fairly poor at most of the things Christ has said to do, including preach the gospel. However, there are many people who are preaching the gospel, perhaps not as many as should, but nonetheless, there are many that are indeed preaching the gospel, who are evangelists and who are trying to reach the lost.

But that's not the same thing as making disciples. You see, when a person preaches the gospel of salvation, they are seeking to elicit from people a decision to follow Christ, repentance from their evil ways, a decision to believe and become a Christian and to be saved. That decision to believe and become a Christian is well and good, but it is only the beginning.

After a person has become a follower of Christ or has made a decision to be a Christian, they have to be discipled. They have to be made into a disciple. That's why the commission is to go and make disciples.

Christ did not say go and make decisions of all nations. We said go and make disciples of all nations. So what is a disciple, anyway? Well, Jesus said that a disciple is a person who continues in his word, that is under the authority of his teaching.

He said that in John 8, 31. He said, If you continue in my word, then you are my disciples indeed. Now, continuing in his word requires a wholehearted commitment because his word is that we need to be prepared to die.

Jesus said, He that seeks to save his life will lose it, but he that will lose his life for my sake shall find it. In Luke 14, verses 25 through 35, Jesus made these statements. He said, Whoever comes to me and does not hate his father and his mother and his wife and his children and his own life also cannot be my disciple.

So being a disciple means that we must love Christ with such a loyalty that all other loves are paled by comparison. In fact, they appear to be hatred by comparison. He also said, And he that will not take up his own cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

And he said, in verse 34, He said, And whoever will not forsake all that he has cannot be my disciple. Now, Jesus is telling us who isn't a disciple and who is. If you continue in his words, you are.

But you cannot continue in his words unless you're willing to forsake everything, including your own life, not only your own comforts, but your relationships, your friends, family, if necessary. That is, following Christ has to be all-consuming. It has to take precedence over all other loyalties and obligations or perceived obligations.

And this is something that is just the beginning. To become a disciple, one must have this as the start. Some people might say, Well, I'll become a Christian and then later maybe I can grow into this business of forsaking all that I have if I must.

No, you can't even be on the team unless you forsake all that you have, unless you take up your cross. You're not even in the family until you come on those terms. But once you have come as a disciple, once you have become a disciple, you are to follow Christ in obedience, to continue in his words, and then you are his disciple indeed.

Which is no doubt why Jesus said when he told his friends to make disciples here, he said you do so by teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you. Well, of course, if a disciple is somebody who follows the words of Jesus, then to make a disciple must require that people be taught what Jesus said so they can continue in his words. And teaching them to observe and to command his commands.

That's what he said it means to make a disciple. Now, I'm getting ahead of myself a little bit because before he mentions this duty to teach people to observe all things he has commanded, there is a prior command and that is to baptize. He says make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Now, that comes before teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you. So, there's two parts of making disciples. One is getting them baptized and the second is getting them taught and trained.

Now, baptized, no doubt, refers here simply to their conversion. Now, I'm not one of those who believes that conversion occurs at baptism or that baptism regenerates. Or even that baptism is essential for salvation.

But I do believe that Christ commands all to be baptized and that we should be baptized. And in the early church, when people did commit themselves to Christ, the first indicator that they had done so was that they were baptized, almost always on the same day. We have no reference in scripture to a person becoming converted on one day and being baptized at a later date.

Unless we would include Saul of Tarsus, who had to wait three days. But it's not exactly clear at what point he was really converted because it was three days after his encounter with Christ on the road that Ananias came and told him he should wash away his sins, which had not yet occurred, apparently. And therefore, baptism was associated throughout scripture with the entry right into the church.

It was the mark of conversion. It was not the same thing as conversion. And certainly a person can be baptized and be unconverted, and they will not be saved by simply being baptized.

It's also possible that a person may be converted, since that's an interior spiritual thing, without having been baptized. However, being baptized was the normative mark in the New Testament times of a convert, of somebody who had become a disciple of Jesus, of

someone who had made a decision, and they were usually water baptized the same day. So when Jesus has made disciples, baptizing them, he's speaking first of all of the entry right into discipleship.

You make a commitment to Christ and you get baptized. Now Jesus said to baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. There are some who want to make a big issue over what formula was uttered when you are baptized.

There are those who point out the true fact that in the book of Acts we read of several times the apostles and others baptized people. And we never read of them saying, I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. As a matter of fact, throughout the book of Acts, invariably when people were baptized, they were baptized in the name of Jesus, or in the name of the Lord Jesus.

We have at least four or five examples of this in the book of Acts, of baptism. They always baptized in the name of Jesus, and we never read of them baptizing in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This fact has led many to believe that we must be baptized not in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but in the name of Jesus.

Because that's how the apostles baptized. Others have said, well, no, we need to be baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, because Jesus said to baptize in that name. Who's right? Well, perhaps neither are right.

If someone says you must use this formula, or you must use that formula, both may be wrong in their use of the word must. Because it is possible that both formulas are equivalent. Because when Jesus said baptize in the name, he did not say the names.

Jesus didn't say baptize in the names of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as if he was talking about three different names. But he said baptize in the name, singular, of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The fact that the disciples forever afterward baptized people in the name of Jesus suggests that they believed that the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is the name of Jesus.

And this agrees well enough with later Christian writings, because Paul said in Colossians 2.9 that in Christ dwelt the fullness of the Godhead bodily. That is, the whole Godhead, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit dwelt bodily in Christ. And thus you will find passages where Jesus is spoken of almost as if equated with the Father or with the Holy Spirit.

As for example, in Isaiah 9.6, which says, Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and his name shall be called. Then it gives several names, including the Everlasting Father. This is a reference to Jesus.

But his name shall be called the Everlasting Father. Jesus said, If you've seen me, you've seen the Father. The Father and I are one.

And the Holy Spirit is also spoken of similarly. In 2 Corinthians 3, it says, Now the Lord is that Spirit. And the Spirit of Jesus, or the Spirit of God, is equated.

In Romans 8, Paul says that if the Holy Spirit is in you, then Christ is in you, because it is the Spirit of Christ. And so we have an interesting and somewhat difficult to understand, maybe impossible to understand, theological fact, that the name of Jesus in the early church apparently embraced the whole Godhead, the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So Jesus commanded to baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

And the disciples understood that to mean to baptize in the name of Jesus. And that's what they did. Well, that's fine, but how does that have impact on our duty today? What if you were baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and no one said, I baptize you in the name of Jesus? Well, it's the same thing.

That is to say, the names are equivalent. If Jesus said, baptize in this name, and you were baptized in that name, you've certainly done nothing disobedient. On the other hand, if someone said, I baptize you in the name of Jesus, as the apostles did, then that's the same thing.

The two terms are equivalent. It doesn't matter which syllables are pronounced. It matters what name or what person, what identity you're being associated with in baptism.

If somebody said, I baptize you in the name of the Lamb of God, or in the name of the Alpha and the Omega, or in the name of the First and the Last, these would be essentially equivalent to the name of Jesus. The issue is not what word is uttered, apparently, as much as what person you are being identified with. Remember Paul said in 1 Corinthians 10 that when the Jews passed through the Red Sea, they were baptized into Moses.

What's that mean? It means that by going through the water and following Moses, they were identifying with Moses and throwing in their lot with him as their leader. And when we're baptized into Christ, it means that he is the one that we're identifying as our leader and our Lord. We're acknowledging his authority over our lives.

And so when a person becomes a Christian, they do so by acknowledging that Jesus is Savior and Lord. And the acknowledgement of that Lordship is that they get baptized into Jesus. The formula that is uttered is less important than the reality.

Is it Jesus or someone else? Were they baptized in the name of Paul? Of course not. They were baptized in the name of Jesus, which is equivalent to the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And to my mind, there's nothing in the Scripture that indicates that God is a stickler over details as far as whether you use this formula or that, so long as it's really Jesus into whom you're being baptized.

The point being, making disciples of all nations initially begins with making converts, getting people to agree that Jesus is Lord and causing them to acknowledge this ritually by baptism. That brings people into the body of Christ. That is the event that is the emblem of their transfer from darkness to light.

And they're throwing in their lot with Jesus and proclaiming their loyalty to him. But making disciples is more than just that. It's not just getting people baptized.

It's getting them trained, that is, discipled. You make disciples by baptizing them and teaching them. See, here's where I think the church has often dropped the ball.

Some churches don't even evangelize, but the ones that do will often get people baptized in the church and then assume that all has been done, let's go out and get some more. These people are safe, but they may not be so safe. Jesus said the next thing you do once you've got them in the door is train them.

He says, teach them to observe all things that I have commanded you. Now, how is that done? How do we teach the converts who have professed faith in Christ, how do we teach them to observe all things Jesus commanded? Do we simply say, okay, now you're a Christian, do everything Jesus said and walk away? No. We can see that the early Christians in Acts chapter 2 sat daily under the apostles' teaching.

And we have every reason to believe that what the apostles taught them day by day was how to observe everything Jesus said. After all, Jesus said a lot of things, and his teachings had a tremendous bearing on personal life and behavior. In fact, Jesus' teachings can be applied profitably to all areas of practical life, whether it's relationships with troublesome neighbors, whether it's work ethics, whether it's stewardship of money, whether it is family relationships, all kinds of things.

The nitty-gritty, down-to-earth stuff of getting by in this world, in this life, are all affected by what Jesus taught. And the discipleship of new converts requires that we take them through the teachings of Jesus and explain to them how these teachings are to impact the way they live. We need to teach them to observe everything that Jesus said.

Does your church do that? Well, I hope it might, but if it's like most churches, I suspect it probably doesn't. I'm not aware of any churches right now. There may be some that are exceptions that I don't know about.

But of the churches I'm acquainted with, I don't know of any that have made it their defined task to not only get people converted, but to get them discipled by taking them through a course of training, where everything Jesus said is presented to them in practical terms. Here's how you obey Christ here. Here's how you obey what Jesus said in dealing with your wife and your children, your employer, your neighbor, your enemy, the government, and so forth.

The teachings of Jesus are law for the disciple. And those who continue in his words are the ones who are his disciples indeed. So to make disciples requires getting persons converted and baptized and trained to observe all things that Jesus commanded.

The final statement Jesus made to his disciples is, Lo, I am with you always, even until the end of the age. That would seem to mean that as you go to all the world and make disciples, you will not be doing this through human effort alone. It will be Christ working through you.

Remember Jesus said to his disciples in the upper room in John 15, Without me you can do nothing. And the great task of the disciple is to change the world. But we are human beings.

We can't do that alone. But through Christ we can do all things, Paul said in Philippians chapter 4. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. If Christ is with me, who can be against me? And Jesus said, Lo, I am with you even until the end of the age.

If it is my task to disciple the nations, to go into all the world, not me as an individual, but the church as a whole, reaching out through various missionaries and efforts to reach the world for Christ, and to change the world, making people into disciples, teaching them to do everything Jesus said, well this is going to require supernatural assistance. And Jesus promises it to his disciples, Lo, I am with you always, even until the end of the age. In Acts chapter 1 he states the same truth a little differently.

He said the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, so that you'll be my witnesses in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. It is the power of the Holy Spirit, the power of Christ working through his church that gets the job done. The way the last verse of the Gospel of Mark puts it was that they went everywhere preaching the word.

It says the Lord working with them, confirming the word with signs following. That is, when the apostles went out to fulfill this commission, Christ was with them. He was with them visibly and powerfully, confirming the word by working signs and wonders to confirm that they were indeed telling the truth.