**Calvary Fellowship 4.16.2023 Matthew 28:18-20 “The End of the Beginning”**

* **When my 7 year old son Xander was just a little guy of 3, he climbed up on my lap after dinner & asks if he can have a sip of my Coke Zero**
* I say OK & give him the can - it doesn’t take a prophet to know what happens next - Xander spills 1/2 the can of soda all over himself
* So I say, “Buddy, what happened?” - he says, “I don’t know dad. I went to take a sip & it went everywhere.” - So I ask, “Show me how U take a sip.”
* Then Xander shows me this where U are essentially aiming the soda in the direction of your mouth & hoping U hit your target
* So I tell him, “Xander, U have to touch the can w/ your lips”
* So then he does what I call “The Seagull”, where U expect your bottom lip to catch all of the beverage
* I tell him that’s not going to work b/c there’s too much open room on top
* So then he does it pretty well - so I let him take a sip & he gets soda all over him - I’m thinking, “How did this happen?”
* Then I realize the opening of the can is on the side - that’s when I tell him he has to line up the opening of the can w/ his mouth
* Then I tell Carey that our son has a drinking problem
* The good news is that Xander is now fully trained in the art of drinking Coke
* There are things that I expected to teach my kids - how to ride a bike, how to tie their shoes - I never thought I’d have to teach them how to drink out of a can
* **The same is true for us - U become a Christian & U expect God having to teach U about forgiveness b/c that can be hard sometimes**
* U expect God having to teach U about how to do relationships correctly b/c so many of us had relationships that imploded before knowing the Lord
* **But when U come rot know Jesus, He wants to rebuild us from the ground up -** Most of us would say, “OK God, listen, I know U mean well, but I’m an educated person. We can skip the beginner stuff”
* I believe just the opposite - when U decide to be a disciple of Jesus, U become a learner - that’s what disciple means - you’re learning how to live life like your rabbi b/c U believe his way is the best possible way to live
* Some of the most basic things are things we have to be taught
* **I’ve learned that we tend to be much more discriminating when it comes to what our mouth consumes than what our mind consumes**
* I tried to give my wife something the other day & she said, "Is it organic, local grown, grass fed, fair trade, with no harmful dyes added?
* I said, "I don't know Carey. It's a Twinkie. Do U want it or not."
* When a rabbi had a disciple (Hebrew = Talmid), it was the job of that disciple to learn everything about the rabbi & do everything like his rabbi
* **A rabbi’s talmids followed the rabbi wherever he went - why?**
* B/c they believed that his way was the best possible way to live
* So they wanted to do everything just like their rabbi
* You’d eat what your rabbi ate, you’d go wherever your rabbi went
* There are stories of talmids following their rabbi into restrooms b/c rabbis had prayers for everything - even restroom prayers thanking God for working parts
* That’s why Jesus’ Talmids asked Him to teach them to pray – remember why?
* B/c John the Baptist taught his Talmids how to pray
* “Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.” (Luke 11:1)
* They wanted to pray just like Jesus b/c that was the goal of their lives - to be just like Jesus in every way b/c that was the goal of following Him
* **So we are in the message #48 - our final message in the Gospel of Matthew - Jesus has risen from the dead & has told His disciples that He would meet them in Galilee**
* And this is where Jesus is going to give them His final message to them
* And it’s a message not just for them - it’s a message for us
* It’s a message about our mission & about the goal of our lives
* Here’s what I believe - if we would really understand what Jesus is telling us, we would change the world
* This group of 11 guys turned the world upside down b/c they embraced this message & I believe God can do it again
* B/c this message, if we embraced it would change us & if we changed, then it’s only a matter of time for everything around us to change…

**———(v. 11-15)———**

**#1 - Disciples don’t get Distracted with Nonsense**

* **There’s 3 reasons this story doesn’t make sense - there’s a logical reason, the Roman reason, & the personal reason**
* The logical reason is, they said, “the disciples came & stole the body while we slept” - the question, how would U know who stole the body if U were asleep?
* They didn’t - that’s what they were paid to say
* The 2nd problem is, the way it worked in the Roman system is, if U were a soldier & lost a prisoner, U got their sentence
* So Roman soldiers always sent in shifts to keep things like this from happening
* So if they really lost the body of Jesus, the soldiers would have been executed
* But here’s the last reason - how many of U are heavy sleepers? Me too
* **When I was a kid in Boston, a car hit the telephone pole that was in our front yard in the middle of the night - the police & fire department came**
* There were lights & sirens - My neighbors all came out to see the commotion
* I found out about it the next morning - I slept through the whole thing
* **When I was in the 12th grade, English was my last class - so occasionally I’d take a nap b/c I was tired by 2PM**
* So I put my head down to take a nap & when I woke up I was the only 1 there - The classroom was totally empty
* What my friends told me that the bell rung, everyone got up & left
* My friends were the last to leave, saw me totally asleep & thought, “Hey, it’d be hilarious if we let ole Bob wake up to an empty classroom.”
* My teacher was the only 1 waiting for me - he said, “Bob, U really need to get your life together” - that’s what I think he said - I may have been dreaming
* My wife on the other hand is a very light sleeper - she once woke up b/c she heard an alarm going on in out neighbor’s house - that’s next level
* **But imagine - you’re a Roman soldier & let’s say you’re dead asleep**
* Then the disciples show up as stealthy as Tom Cruise in all the Mission: Impossible movies - U hear the light theme song playing in the background
* Then they turn to each other & say, “Ok guys, let’s move this 2 ton stone & hope these guys are heavy sleepers” - yeah, that doesn’t work
* That’s why Matthew doesn’t even deal w/ it beyond saying, “Yeah that’s the story these geniuses put together”
* **Do U know he doesn’t send a lot of time on it? B/c he didn’t need to**
* He’s writing from the perspective of what happened as the Gospel went forth from these 12 guys - it transformed the world
* And they didn’t transform the world by answering every non-sensical idea that showed up - they changed the world b/c their lives were changed
* That’s why the greatest testimony U have is your own changed life
* **Some of U know my story - I was on the 5 year plan to graduate HS**
* That’s why I tell people that being a Senior was the best 2 years of my life
* I failed all 4 years of English in High School & had to go to Summer School every year to take English for the 2nd time
* And I remember about 15 years ago when I started writing my 1st book - I didn’t think I could do it & guess what? I was right - I was a grammatical disaster
* So I starting reading books on grammar - now friends, there is no topic more boring than grammar - 1 book I read was called, “The Glamor of Grammar”
* They had 1 chapter just dedicated to the proper use of a semi-colon
* I had never used a semi-colon in my life - in High School I thought a semi-colon was a comma that wouldn’t really commit to its true calling
* But fast forward & I’ve written 7 books & that little book “Begin” is in its 7th printing & I get messages from people all over the world who have read it
* U know, I’ve been finishing a Master’s degree in theology & I’m graduating in May - but I got a phone call last week that I’m going to be the valedictorian
* Now, Peter says we need to hav an answer for the hope that’s within us
* But understand this - we don’t argue people into the kingdom of God
* That’s why your changed life is the most powerful advertisement for everything that God can do in someone’s life

**———(v. 16-17)———**

**#2 - Disciples See Jesus Beyond their Doubts**

* **So a friend of mine used to live in NYC & he is a huge country music fan & has been trying to get me to like country music for years**
* It has only started to work over the last year or 2
* Well, he live in a big NYC high-rise & that means he has to get up every morning, would leave his apartment, get on the elevator w/ his dog to go to the street to walk him
* Almost everyday this pretty girl would end up on the elevator w/ him & she’d have her dog w/ her & she were there to walk her dog too
* Whenever they ran into each other they’d talk small talk & talk about their dogs & whatever else came up
* 1 day my friend’s wife went w/ him to walk the dog 1 morning & it just so happened that the nice pretty girl showed up on the elevator as well
* They all talked for a few minutes & then she went back to her apartment & my friend & his wife were still outside
* Then they get back on the elevator & my friend’s wife turns to him & says, “Is that the girl U talk to every morning?” - He says, “Yeah.”
* She says, “Honey. That’s Beyonce.” - He says, “Wow. Who’s Beyonce?”
* I was telling my family this story at dinner the other night & everyone laughs & then my 10 year son says, “Dad, that’s hilarious! By the way, Who is Beyonce?”
* **Think about that - not recognizing someone who is very recognizable**
* That’s part of the problem that the disciples have here
* Remember, the women at the tomb were told by Jesus to have the disciples meet Him in Galilee - this didn’t happen the next day
* It could have been as much as a month later - it was at least 2 weeks later
* “But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee.” (Matthew 26:32 NKJV)
* **I know we touched on this topic on Easter, but I wasn’t able to give it the time it deserved, so I want to cover this now**
* What is it that the disciples were doubting? Let’s examine the scene here
* It says they saw Him - then they worship Him, but some doubted
* What are they doubting? They are doubting that it’s Jesus - why?
* Ok, let’s back up - print to Jesus’ ascension into heaven, which is recorded in Acts 1, Jesus makes at least 10 appearances to individuals & groups of people
* What is the most common thing between all of them? They don’t recognize Him
* “Now when she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?’ She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, ‘Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Mary!' She turned and said to Him, ‘Rabboni!’ (which is to say, Teacher).” (John 20:14-16 NKJV)
* Mary doesn’t recognize Him until she hears His voice
* “Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.” (John 20:19-20 NKJV)
* It was when they saw Jesus’ wounds that they knew it was Him
* In Luke 24, 2 disciples are walking from Jerusalem to a town called Emmaus which is just a few miles away from Jerusalem
* And they’re having the conversations that everyone has when they lose someone who’s close to them - “What do we do now?”
* Listen, these guys had walked away from everything to follow Jesus & now that Jesus was gone, what are they supposed to do?
* Do they go back to their old careers & pretend that none of this ever happened?
* Do they try something new or go back home & tell everyone they know that things didn’t work w/ the Rabbi from Galilee?
* They’re confused - they’re afraid - worried - they’re uncertain about the future
* Then Jesus shows up & starts walking w/ them & they didn’t recognize Him
* “Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight.” (Luke 24:30-31 NKJV)
* Once Jesus prayed & He handed them the bread w/ His nail-scarred hands, that’s when their eyes were opened & they knew it was Him
* So the question is, how could they not recognize Him? The answer to that question isn’t found in the Gospels - it’s found in the OT prophets
* “I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting.” (Isaiah 50:6 NIV)
* From this verse it seems Jesus’ beard was ripped off as part of the torture
* “Just as there were many who were appalled at him—his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being and his form marred beyond human likeness.” (Isaiah 52:14 NIV)
* The scourging, the beatings from the soldiers, & ultimately, the cross disfigured Jesus’ body & He didn’t look the same
* The disciples meet Jesus on the mountain in Galilee & some recognize right away that it’s Him, but other doubt & aren’t sure at 1st
* But then He spoke what have become 1 of the most famous passages in the Bible & the they knew who it was…

**———(v. 18-20)———**

**#3 - Disciples Live out the Message of Jesus**

* **This last passage is what theologians call “The Great Commission”**
* It’s Jesus’ charge to His disciples to raise up people to follow Him like they followed Him - He’s asking them to reproduce themselves into others
* Where does it begin? It begins w/ baptism
* Baptism originally referred to ceremonial washings by those entering the temple & Gentiles who were converting to Judaism
* It became part of Christian ceremony when John the Baptist & Jesus’ disciples began baptizing those who were deciding to follow Jesus
* **Several years ago when I baptized my niece & nephew, my daughter Mia wanted me to baptize her - I said no b/c she was too young**
* I said, “What until you’re 8 & U really understand what baptism is.”
* That night Mia is in the bath & she’s leaning back into the water
* Carey says, “What are U doing?” - She says, “I’m baptizing myself.” Carey says, “U can’t baptize yourself.” Mia says, “Really? Watch me.”
* **U laugh, but when Mia was around 3 & she had this little kids Bible that she would read all the time & 1 day we were reading the Bible as a family**
* We started talking about Jesus coming into our lives & forgiving us
* So I asked Mia if she wanted to pray & ask Jesus to forgive her
* And she said, “It’s OK Dad, I already did.” - I said, “Now when did this happen?”
* She said, “I did it by myself.” - When? - She said, “1 day, I was in my room & I prayed to God myself.” - I said, “Why would U go & do a thing like that?”
* So I said, “Tell me exactly what U prayed.” - She said, “I asked Jesus to come into my heart & forgive me b/c Jesus died on the cross.”
* I said, “First, Mia, that’s wonderful. Second, I think you’re the only person on earth who has led themselves to Jesus. Third, no more significant spiritual moments w/o Mom or Dad being there.”
* **By the way, baptism is what separates the fans of Jesus from the followers of Jesus - what if U were baptized as an infant like me?**
* There isn’t 1 instance where the Bible records an infant baptism
* The reason is b/c baptism is supposed to come from a person who is follower of Jesus & desires to obey Jesus
* Only a person who understands what baptism is should be baptized - That’s why Peter tells us about baptism & that’s it’s an issue of conscience
* "And this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God.” (1 Peter 3:21)
* Can I challenge U in something? Maybe the direction you’re looking for from God is on the other side of your obedience to God - get baptized (check off CC)
* Then Jesus says, “Teaching them to observe everything I commanded U”
* The biggest need I see in the church at large today is a lack of teaching
* There’s lots of preaching & lots of hype, but very little teaching
* So it shouldn’t surprise us that believers are weak & fragile in their faith
* That’s why I have made it my mission for the last 22 years to peach through books of the Bible b/c I know of no better way to feed people spiritually
* **But I want to leave U w/ 3 areas for growth for us as disciples of Jesus:**
* **#1 - Your Head - Growing in the knowledge of God**
* “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” (2 Peter 3:18 NKJV)
* Listen, U can’t know God’s will if U don’t know God’s word
* **U can’t grow to maturity w/o accepting God’s Word as your authority**
* And here’s why U want to grow to maturity - b/c when U obey God even when U don’t understand it, it leads to joy & the blessing of God on your life
* **#2 - Your Hands - Growing in Service to God**
* This is where we take the things that we’ve learned, we take our gifts & talents, we take the things we’re passionate about & we put them into service for God
* “God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another. Do you have the gift of speaking? Then speak as though God himself were speaking through you. Do you have the gift of helping others? Do it with all the strength and energy that God supplies. Then everything you do will bring glory to God through Jesus Christ. All glory and power to him forever and ever! Amen.” (1 Peter 4:10-11 NLT)
* Every believer is part of the body of Christ & we all have a role to play
* But understand, we don’t grow to maturity just receiving & taking in teaching
* We need to be poured into so we can pour into others
* **#3 - Your Heart - Growing in Emotional Maturity**
* It is impossible to grow beyond your emotional maturity
* This is why, if you’ve ever met someone who is angry & hostile, but they say they love Jesus - they probably do to the best of their ability
* But b/c they are emotionally immature, they can’t grow more spiritually
* This is so vital - U need to grow your own heart & love god w/ all of your being
* “Jesus answered him, ‘The first of all the commandments is: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’” (Mark 12:29-20 NKJV)
* Jesus telling us that to be His disciple, we need to grow in all 3 areas
* **So why does Matthew end this way? B/c we are all links in the chain**
* This 11 made disciples of the next generation & that generation made disciples of the following generation & it eventually gets to us
* U hearing the Gospel & your life being transformed by Jesus is directly linked to this moment of the disciples living by Jesus’ words
* And the next generation - the people around us, those who we know who are far from God, we become the link in their chain
* B/c that’s how the world changes - people change, then families change, then neighborhoods change, then cities change, then nations change
* And this is the promise that Jesus gives every disciple of His - including U & me
* “I’m always w/ U. I’ll be w/ U until the very end b/c the end of the your life isn’t the end - it’s just the end of the beginning”