

Go Make Disciples

Matthew 28:18-20

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We serve a faithful God. We serve a good God. The lyrics in that song, I love them, especially this idea of God's goodness chasing us, running after us. It comes from Psalm 23 where it says *Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life*, and really that can be translated, "...Your goodness and mercy are chasing after me."

If you can't tell, this morning's a little bit different. This week and next week are the weekends of the year where we kind of try to take a step back. We pause in our normal series and we talk about what God is doing around the world. It is our *Global Outreach Weekend*, where we talk about the amazing work that God is doing, and we think about ways that we can participate, ways we can engage in that work.

I want to think about that a little bit this morning with you, and in order to do that, I want to think about Jesus' very last words in the Gospel of Matthew. Last words are pretty important, aren't they? They tend to linger. You can imagine the impact that last words would have—a good word or a kind word or a harsh word—and how those words would linger, would kind of sit on the person that receives them for a long time. Last words have a pretty powerful impact, and I think that it'd be safe to say that if you could measure everyone's last words, the impact of those last words, you'd be hard pressed to find last words that have had a greater impact than the last words of Jesus. His words, His final words to His disciples, set the world ablaze. We want to look at those words this morning. If you have your Bibles, turn with me to Matthew 28. We're going to be looking at three verses—verses 18 to 20. These words come, of course, when Jesus has gathered His disciples, and after His resurrection, He's gathered them together, and He's kind of giving them the final charge, the final kind of commission. We call these words actually *The Great Commission*; I hope you're familiar with them. Let's read them together. It says:

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (*NIV, Matt. 28:18-20)

So this is where Matthew's Gospel comes to an end, but of course we know the story isn't finished here is it? I like to think of these words as Jesus' kind of final marching orders to His disciples, to His followers, and boy, did they take those words and run with them! Those words motivated their action for years to come and have motivated the church for two millennia. These words have motivated this church. Some of you might remember that ten years ago—it was on September 9, 2009—we sent out a team to Poland to go make disciples in that place—go plant churches in Poland. And it was eight years ago this coming January, that my wife and I and six others from this church set out to go make disciples, to go plant churches in Spain, motivated by this very passage. Now if you're anything like me, when you read this passage, your eye immediately goes to the call *to go*, and if you're a little bit like me, you might get a little anxious and you might think to yourself, "Oh, Lord, please don't put some kind of conviction on me today about that. Okay? Anyone, maybe two seats to the right, tell

them to go, but not me.” Right? “I’m thankful that we have missionaries, but I just don’t want to be one of them.”

And so I’m going to do something this morning, to start off, that maybe missions’ pastors aren’t supposed to do. I’m going to tell you we’re not going to talk about *going*. Not yet. We’ll get to that. But I want to focus on this important little word we read in verse 19. That sentence starts with **Therefore**, and I just want to tell you that “*therefore*” is really important. When you read your Bibles, and you come across a “*therefore*”, what that “*therefore*” is indicating is that whatever is about to be said is based, is grounded, can only be said, because of what was just said before. It’d be like me saying, “Hey, we’re going to go on this trip to India; *therefore*, don’t drink the water.” Okay? Or if we’re on the trip, it’d be like me saying, “Hey, you drink the water, *therefore* the next few days could be a little rough.” (*laughter* Jesus, in verse 18 says this. He says, “**All authority in heaven and earth has been given to Me. Therefore...**” As a follower of Jesus, a disciple of His, do you know that you’re following a Master, a Lord, a Savior that has authority? Do you think of Him that way?

How much authority does He have? Does He have *some* authority? No! He has *all* authority. It doesn’t leave out a whole lot, right? Jesus is essentially saying to His disciples, to His followers, “Listen, I’m the ruler over everything. I have reign over all there is—things in heaven, things on earth—all of it is under My care. I have say over all of it.” That’s why we call Him the King of kings and the Lord of lords. That’s why when we get to Colossians, Paul can say, “*He is so high. There’s no one higher; everything’s been put under His feet. The earth is His footstool. He has all authority!*”

So, what does it mean to have authority? Well, a real basic way to think about authority would be this. If you have authority, you have say over something. All of us have some level of authority, right? You have authority over your dog. Right? Small authority. Sometimes that can be pretty frustrating; You don’t feel like you have much authority. Your car! If you own a business, you have pretty grand authority—large authority, but it means you have say over something. You have power, power to affect change, power to create. That is what it means to have authority.

I’ve learned a little bit about authority by pretending to have it. Have you guys ever done that... pretended you have authority? There was a time when I was in college. My school and where we lived was in the suburbs of Chicago. So a buddy and I said, “Hey, you know what? Let’s put on our nicest suits, and let’s see if we go downtown, how many buildings can we sneak around? Just kind of walk by security and kind of wave and just act like we have authority? Let’s see what can happen.” Not a good idea, right? (*laughter*) But we were young, and so we went down, and you know what the answer is? You can go pretty far if you act like you have authority. We got to the top of the Sears Tower. We just rolled through security; we waved to people, called them the wrong name. But you know what? We were nervous the entire time, because we knew that all it would take is one little question, and we’d be exposed. “Who are you?” “I don’t care that you have a suit on.” “Who are you and what do you think you’re doing?” And we’d be undone because we had *pretend* authority, right? *Pretend* power. Now, compare that with a few years ago when I went with a member of our congregation to a building that he worked at in downtown Lincoln. It happened to be an office that was on the top couple of floors of a building downtown. And boy, we just walked through doors; we went through secret hallways. He had keys that would open the elevators that the general public couldn’t open, because he was the president. He was the president of the company, right? I was with the person that ran the place. He had authority. And you know, when I was with him, I kind of started to strut around a little bit like I kind of had some authority. But it was just him, right? He had real authority; he had real power.

So Jesus says He has all authority, all power. He has say over everything, and, really, if you look at His life, if you look at His ministry, we see this on display throughout His entire ministry. In fact, this is what got Him in trouble with the people that thought *they* had authority. The scribes and the Pharisees kind of had this pretend authority, but Jesus, the One who had real authority, threatened them.

I just want to walk through two quick little passages that kind of give us a little glimpse about the way that Jesus had authority. First thing I want to kind of draw your attention to is that Jesus had authority in his words, right? Like when He spoke, things happened. So Jesus, in Matthew 5, 6, and 7 is giving His Sermon on the Mount—this powerful sermon—and when that sermon draws to a close, Matthew says this in Matthew 7, verses 28 and 29:

And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished [they were amazed] at His teaching, [Why?] for He was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes. (*ESV, Matthew 7:28-29))

So His words were heard, and His words fell on His listeners in a fundamentally different way than the teachings they had heard previously. So what was so different? Well, I think we all know that when you hear from a speaker and you're like, "Boy, that was powerful," what we mean is that those words impacted us deeply; they rang true. They sat on us with the weight of authority. We couldn't avoid them. We couldn't just kind of dismiss them. We didn't walk away and say, "Boy, that was interesting." Those words left an impact on us! And Jesus spoke what was true, and it ran to the core of His listeners. And we know that He could do that, of course, because He's the one that has *all* authority. Therefore, when He speaks, His words leave an impact. They have power. Throughout His time, His words carried the weight of authority and His listeners were constantly amazed at the impact of His words.

Second thing that we can see in Jesus' life are that His deeds, His works, displayed His authority. There's a longer passage in Matthew 9, verses 1 to 8. Just kind of sit back for a moment and listen to this; take this in:

And getting into a boat Jesus crossed over and came to His own city. And behold, some people brought to Him a paralytic, lying in a bed. And when Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven." That's an authority statement, right?] And behold, some of the scribes said to themselves, "This man is blaspheming." But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, "Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—He then said to the paralytic—"Rise, pick up your bed and go home." And he rose and went home. When the crowd saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God, who had given authority to men.

Jesus possessed authority, not just in His words, but in His actions. And what we see displayed over and over again is He possessed authority, power over the natural world. Sickneses were healed by Him. He walks on the water. He turns the water into wine. He calms the storm with His word. And He didn't do these things because He kind of knew magic tricks, right? Jesus did this because He is in charge of the natural world. He speaks and it listens.

But not just that. The spiritual world responds to Him as well, right? He has the power to forgive sins. He tells demons what to do. They're afraid of Him; they run in His presence. They beg Him not

to do what He can do. He goes into the wilderness and He confronts Satan—goes toe to toe with Satan—and comes out victorious. Jesus has all authority over the natural world, over the spiritual world; He has say over all of it. Do you think of Him that way? He's the one who has all say.

You know, one of the challenges I think of being a Christian for a long time, if you're anything like me, is I just know that there are times where I have to confront the fact that the sense of awe and wonder I have at Jesus isn't what it should be, isn't what His person demands because He has all authority. But I can start to kind of lose sight of that, and when I pray, I can find that my prayers don't necessarily—I don't know—they're not loaded with faith, thinking He has all authority; He has all power. When I pray for someone that's sick, do I think to myself that Jesus is the One that commands the natural world, who has all authority?

Just one of the reasons that I love being around new believers—why it's so fun to make disciples—is because new believers have this sense of wonder and awe. They look at Jesus and they are just astounded! They're amazed! And boy, is that good for my soul, because I want to be stirred up in that way. I want to look at Jesus afresh and give Him the respect that He's due because of the authority that He holds. We've talked before about what an amazing thing it is to be a disciple of Jesus, right? When we're with Him, we're with the Person that has all wisdom. He is all loving. What we see here is that He is all authoritative. He has all the power in the world, and we get to be with Him.

So we want to pause for a second; we want to reflect on that. It could be that you're here this morning, and you've never surrendered your life to Jesus, right? All of us try to be in charge of our own lives, but the power that we have to do that on our own is so meager. And this moment of surrender is a moment when we look at Jesus and say, “You have all power; You have all authority; I want to give my life to You.” And if you've never done that, I want to invite you to do that. Just in the quietness of your own seat, in your own mind, God will hear you. Just say, “God, You take it from here, I don't want to take charge anymore.”

But it could be that you're here and you've been a believer, and maybe my challenge to you is just to think, to reflect upon whether or not you're approaching Jesus as the Person that has all authority. When you pray, do you approach Him that way? When you're kind of going through life, when you're working with your kids or you're going through family crises or you're having trouble with your friends or you're not knowing what to do in your business, do you think about Jesus as the One that has all power, all authority and has say over everything? Do we cling to Him in that way?

In order to do that this morning—we're going to come together—we're going to celebrate communion. Of course, when we come together and celebrate communion, what we're commemorating is that Jesus is the One that went to the cross, and in His death and burial and resurrection, He defeated sin and death. And finally, as He resurrected, He stood victorious over all these things that hold the world captive. And now He's the one that has all authority. He's the King of kings, the Lord of lords. There are governments, but Jesus is above all of these.

And so we come together, and we remember His cross. We remember the victory that He gained on the cross. And we're people of the cross. But we're also people that come and can stand in His life now, stand in His victory. So, we're a people of the cross. We're a people that stand, right? Our identity is found in the death and burial and resurrection of Jesus, right? We've been buried with Him and raised now to life with Him. And we stand now in the authority that He stands in. Just like I walked through that business office and kind of strutted around like I have something to say. We're a with-Him people. We're with the One that has all authority and that is what motivates us to be on mission. It's not that we look at the Great Commission and we say, “Okay, we better just go, right?”

We better kind of grit our teeth and do it.” It’s that we’re grounded in the authority of Jesus, and we’re a people that are with Him. And He’s the One that has all the authority. He’s the One that has all the power.

You know, as we come to weekends like this, I’ve gotta admit that I struggle a little bit as a missions’ pastor, because, you know, we dig into texts like this—the Great Commission—and my fear is that when we say, “Hey, it’s a global outreach weekend,” my fear is that it’s so easy to say, “Oh, this is that weekend that other people that want to be missionaries, they kind of get to dial in, they get to focus on what’s being said.” Or we’re talking about the Great Commission, and it’s like, “Oh yeah, I’m so thankful that other people get really passionate about that and they go and engage in that, you know?” I get concerned about that because you know, the truth is that this was a text that is intended for all of us, right? This is a Christian-life text. This isn’t a mission’s text. Now, of course, let me say clearly, as a church we want to be a church that sends missionaries. It’s absolutely what we’re about. We want to send missionaries to the farthest reaches of the world. We want to go where Jesus is not proclaimed. That is something we are absolutely about! It is a vision that we have, and we want to do it. But *all of us* are called to make disciples—not just missionaries, not just pastors—all of us! All of us are called to go out and stand in the authority of Jesus and be motivated by the fact that we’re with Him, engaging in the work that He is passionate about that. This is a Christian-life text, not a missions’ text. This is an all-of-us kind of mandate, not just a missionary mandate. See, what disciples do, is disciples make disciples. And so I get conflicted on that, because I don’t want to focus too much on missionaries, right?

I don’t want to focus too much on the fact that we want to *send* missionaries, because I don’t want to miss the fact that, Church, this is our call. In this city, this is our call. In fact, some people would say, some commentators would say that when we look at the Great Commission, a good way to translate it would be to say, “Therefore, as you go, make disciples.” In other words, as you go to the store, as you go into your neighborhood, as you go to your place of work, as you go to parties with friends, as you go to the places that you go, as you’re going, make disciples. So this is an all of us kind of thing.

But the world’s a big place, and Jesus does say, “Make disciples of all nations,” and basically, what that word means—all nations—it just means all people, every kind of person. And so that call has to send us out and has to move the boundaries of where we’re thinking about past our neighborhood and past our city and past our state, and it has to start to kind of help us think about the whole world.

So, let me tell you a little bit. I said at the beginning that the Great Commission was one of the things that motivated my wife and myself and our team, the team that went to Poland from this church, that motivated us to go out on mission, right, to go to a place where Jesus’ name was not proclaimed, to go engage in that. So, I just want to take a few minutes and just tell you about that process, because the truth is, I never wanted to be a missionary...ever! I grew up in a church; it was part of a denomination called the Christian and Missionary Alliance. Some of you may know that church, but we had missions’ conferences every year. In the summer all these missionaries would come back and they’d put on kind of the dress or the clothes that were kind of popular or kind of known in the area they worked. And they’d serve this incredible food—like the best food! There was this one lady named Twee, and she made these egg rolls that, to this day, I dream about. And I loved missions’ conference for that reason, but I certainly didn’t, never wanted to feel any kind of sense of burden to go be a missionary, right? Last thing on my mind. There’s even a song about it, “*Please Don’t Send Me to Africa*,” right? A song that we sang as kids. I never wanted to be a missionary. You know what I wanted to do? Any high schoolers that are here, this could be a dream for you in the future. What I wanted to do was live in my parent’s basement, never get married, and drive a Camaro. That was the dream, right? My uncle did that till he was like thirty, and I was like, “He is the coolest

person I've ever known.” (*laughter*) That's what I wanted. But I'll tell you, I wanted comfort; I wanted predictability. I wanted success. I wanted to be near my family, and you know, I didn't know that I wanted all those things, that I clung to all those things, until I had to face this prompting that was kind of occurring within me to maybe “go”. And suddenly, all these things that I really was clinging to became very, very clear to me, and in terms of things you don't want to learn about yourself, that ranks pretty high. I hated seeing that in me. I found myself clinging to comfort so much. I never wanted to be a missionary.

But as I sat and I reflected on these things—passages like this one, and others like it—I thought about the fact that there are places around the world where Jesus’ name just isn't known; there are no churches; there are no disciples who make disciples. That means there are people living lives of desperation, not connected to a power, to authority, to a person that actually has what it takes to help them live life the way God intended it to be lived. As I thought about that, I had to start to surrender some of those things, and I had to come to grips with the fact that, you know, I have no say over what God is saying to that person or that person or that person, but I do have some responsibility to deal with what I felt like He was saying to me—and so we went.

My wife, myself, and six other people got on a plane and we went to Spain and we went to a city we didn't know. My wife had never stepped foot in this city; she has more faith than I do. We went to a language that we didn't know, to a people we didn't know, and we kind of said we're going to try to perform, engage in this impossible task. We're going to try to start a church in a place where we know no one. We're going to try to make disciples with people that speak a language that we don't know. And I'll tell you, what we had to do is we had to cling to the Person that has authority, because the anxiety we encountered in doing that was so overwhelming. As we went, we kind of encountered this irony that, in going, we were stepping into this terrifying task, but then we encountered this thrilling thing of learning to lean on Jesus, the One who has all authority, all power. And so stepping into this terrifying realm allowed us to enter into this new relationship with Jesus, kind of in a fresh way. And then we had to cling to the fact that He tells us, at the end of the Great Commission, “I'll never leave you,” right? He says, “**And surely I am with you, even to the end of the age.**”

Church, the Great Commission is a Christian-life text, right? This is for all of us. God has called all of us as believers, as followers, as disciples of His, to be disciple-making people, no matter where we are. As we go out, we're to be people who make disciples. But I can't help but wonder whether God might be talking to a few individuals here about the people that are way over there on the other side of the world that don't know His name. I can't help but wonder whether God might be stirring in a few people a prompting to maybe engage in this mission in that way—to go, to step into the life as a missionary, to go to a place where Jesus isn't known and make disciples in a cross-cultural environment. And so, as we close, I want to get practical. I just want to talk to whoever you are, right? Now, if that's not you, I ask you just to pray for those people, pray that they'd listen to God's voice if God is stirring in them in that way.

But we wanted to get practical and say, “Okay, what will be some practical steps,” and so in your bulletin, we gave you a bookmark, right? If you read books, you can use this. On this bookmark, we outlined three steps you can take. The first one is just to be *praying*. Just talk with God about what you're thinking, what you're feeling, not just what you're feeling maybe He's calling you to, but the anxieties that you have, because those are very real. Just talk to Him about that. And sometimes what I like to do is, I like to say, “Lord, use everything in my life to clarify what You're calling me to, or what You're asking of me. Use the things I read. Use the friends I talk to. Use the mentors in my life. Use my circumstances to clarify whether this is actually what you're saying.” So, talk with God about that, and if what you feel is that there is some clarity, you need to take a next step.

Then we just ask you to do that next step, to enter into a process of preparation. Come talk to us. We're just calling it *prepare*. Email us or go talk to Jason at the *Spotlight Booth*, or come talk to me after the service. Just talk to us about what you feel like God might be doing. Talking to us does not mean that we'll pull out a phone and buy you a ticket. Okay? Rest assured. What it will mean is we'll say, "Hey, let's keep asking God to clarify this. And not only that, but let's start to prepare for what God might be calling you to. Let's start to prepare for the work that He may be asking you to go engage in." Step 2 is: *prepare*.

The last step: If God just keeps confirming that over and over and over again is to, "Go," then we would come together as a church, and we would celebrate that. And we would bless that movement of God, and we would say, "We want to bless you going out, knowing that you're going with Jesus, the One who has all authority, knowing that He's there, and He will never leave your side. He'll be with you every step of the way." So, *pray, talk to us, prepare, and go*. If God's prompting something in you, we just ask you to take your next step and we encourage you to do that.

And we also know that there are people in here that are saying, "You know what, I'm not on board with that. I'm not ready to change my job, that kind of thing. But, man, I really want to see what God is doing around the world. I really want to see the work He's engaged in." And so we told you last year about these engagement trips that we would start to do in 2019—opportunities to go and see God at work in places, see Him making disciples, see His name being made known. And so this year alone, we've gone to Mexico; we've had people go to Kenya. Jason took a team to India, and in a couple of weeks we're trying to go to Lebanon, if the political unrest will calm down a little bit. But next year there are more trips and we would encourage you, if you would like to go see what God is doing around the world, then consider, pray about whether you should take a step and just engage in one of these trips. The next step would be the same: Talk to us, talk to Jason at the *Spotlight Booth*, email me, tweet me. I'll find it. You can #Ryan, "I want to go."

Church, God has called us to be a disciple-making people. That's what we're engaged in; that's our job. So we want to be a people that go and make disciples, but we want to do that in and with the authority of our Lord Jesus, and we want to walk in the security and the sufficiency, knowing that He will be with us every step of the way. Can you just imagine what Lincoln would look like if it'd be full of disciples of Jesus...what this state would look like...what the world would look like if we just have people surrendering to Him and saying, "You're in charge"? We pray that would happen. Will you join me in prayer?

Our Father, we thank You that You are more active than anyone else in this world, that You are working. Even though we don't know how You're working, God, we just know that You are pursuing people. You are making Your name known. And, Jesus, we thank You for the work that You're doing. And we thank You that You're the One that has all authority, and we just say right now, "You are the King of kings and Lord of lords," and we want Your name to be praised. So, Lord, we pray that You would speak clearly to each one of us and tell us what the step that You want us to engage in is, and we pray that we'd be a people that would just, in faith, step out and respond to what You're asking us to do. And we ask that You do all this for Your namesake, for Your glory, for Your fame. Amen.

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