



Title: Preparing for a New Season - Introduction

Text: Matthew 28, Joshua 1 (and other texts)

Date: August 7, 2022

Main Idea: God brings us into new seasons and prepares us as we move forward.

Personal Study Guide

READ ENTIRE TEXTS: MATTHEW 28:16-20, JOSHUA 1, ACTS 1-2, MICAH 6:6-8

Highlight – What stands out?

Note: This series will be slightly different than our *Story and Song* series because we are looking at different texts each week. For this lesson, each

section will follow the same format, but will be divided based on main headings.

God Brings Us Into New Seasons – Read Joshua 1

What is happening in this text? Who are the main characters?

Did you read any words, phrases, or ideas that were familiar to you? Any that were unfamiliar to you? Do you notice anything in Joshua 1 that you have read or heard before in the Old Testament?

What is the setting of this text? Where has Joshua been up to this point? Where is he heading?

God Prepares Us for New Seasons – Read John 13-16, Acts 1-2

What is happening in these texts? (The John ones will be familiar to you!) Who are the main characters?

What is the setting? Where are the characters in John 13-16 and what leads them to Acts 1-2?

God Commissions Us for New Seasons – Read Matthew 28:16-20, Micah 6:6-8, John 17

What and who does Jesus pray for in John 17?

List out all the things Jesus is commanding them in Matthew 28:16-20.

What is God calling them to in Micah 6:6-8?

Explain – What does this mean?

Note: This section will be shorter because the Highlight section is longer. The emphasis on the rest of the lesson is on the Apply and Respond section because of the practical nature of this series.

God Brings Us Into New Seasons – Joshua 1

What does God command Joshua to do through Moses? What does he promise him? Look up Deuteronomy 31:1-8 for context.

Look at verses 6-9, 18. What phrase is repeated multiple times? Why do you think this is important based on the task before Joshua?

God Prepares Us for New Seasons – Read John 13-15, Acts 1-2

What is promised in John and what happens in Acts?

How does this prepare them for the season that is ahead of them?

God Commissions Us for New Seasons – Read Matthew 28:16-20, Micah 6:6-8, John 17

How are all three of these commissions similar? How are they different? Think about God's larger purposes in the world (both then and today). How does God's commission still ring true today?

Apply – How does this change me?

1. These last few years have been very transitional for everyone. Think about all that God promised in every transition we've looked at in these texts. What does this promise look like for you as you step into new seasons?

2. What type of season are you in currently? Are you in a season of waiting, obeying, changing, trusting, or doing? What is challenging about that season? What gives you hope?

3. If you could categorize one overarching theme from all the texts of scripture we looked at—what does God promise his people? How does this encourage you in our new season at Immanuel?

Respond – What’s my next step?

1. In the life of our church, what area are you currently serving in to help usher us into this new season? What area can you step into?

2. What is it that you know you need to do in this season? Is there a sin you need to confess—don’t delay! Is there a relationship that needs to be reconciled—send that text or make that phone call! Is there a ministry team you need to join—do it today! Do you need to spend more time in prayer or in the word—make a plan!

Commentary: Taken from “Joshua: No Falling Words” by Dale Ralph Davis and “Exalting Jesus in Matthew” by David Platt

Joshua: No Falling Words by Dale Ralph Davis

The Promise of God and Four Funerals
(Joshua 1:1–18; 24:29–33)

Several months ago I was reading Edward Eggleston's *The Hoosier Schoolboy* to one of my sons. We'd had the book in our collection for some time but had never read it. Finally, Seth and I tackled it. He was quite taken with it and really became caught up in the story. In fact, he read the last chapter on his own so that he would know all along how 'it finally turned out'. That is not a bad idea—even for a biblical book. Normally, one might expect a writer to raise some of his foremost concerns in his introduction and conclusion. Hence, we propose to look at the very beginning *and* the very end of Joshua first in order to gain a perspective from which to view the whole book.

In the case of Joshua, this means that we find ourselves attending four funerals. Let's attend Moses' funeral first and save the rest for later in our discussion.

The Promise of God and the First Funeral (1:1–18)

Before entering into an exposition of the themes of chapter 1, it will be well to notice how the chapter is put together. The chapter falls into two major sections, both of which follow the same main pattern:

- Death of Moses, 1a
- Yahweh's charge to Joshua, 1b–9
 - Yahweh's command to action, 1b–4
 - 'Cross over ...'
 - 'The land I am giving ...'
 - Yahweh's encouragement to Joshua, 5–9
 - 'I will be/am with you' (beginning and end of section)
 - 'Be strong and be bold' (three times in the middle of section)
- Joshua's charge to Israel, 10–18
 - Joshua's command to prepare for action, 10–15
 - To people (via officers), 10–11
 - 'You are going to cross over ...'
 - 'The land Yahweh ... is giving'
 - To eastern tribes, 12–15
 - 'You must cross over ...'
 - 'The land Yahweh ... is giving'
 - People's encouragement to Joshua, 16–18
 - 'Yahweh ... be with you'
 - 'Be strong and bold'

From this sketch at least two emphases emerge: the land is God's gift and yet there is the command to lay hold of that gift, and encouragement is given to

the leader of God's people. The encouragement in both cases comes to Joshua, who, as we shall see, doubtless needed it greatly. This theme carries into chapters 3–4 (see 3:7; 4:14). Interestingly, chapter 1 is almost entirely direct speech rather than descriptive narrative; the writer uses the speeches of others to tell his story. Now for a more detailed exposition.

The Vitality of Yahweh's Promise (1:1–4)

The first theme the writer underscores is the vitality of Yahweh's promise. The *content* of the promise has to do with Yahweh's gift of the land (vv. 2–4, 6, 11, 15). And some land! As in Genesis 15:18, Deuteronomy 1:7, and 11:24, the eastern boundary is the Euphrates River. You must get out your Bible atlas to believe or disbelieve it! But what is important to see is that this is the promise God made long ago to Abraham and company (Gen. 12:6–7; 13:14–15; 15:7, 18–21; 17:8; 24; 26:3–4; 28:13–14; 35:12; 48:3–4; 50:24). Hence the theological roots of Joshua 1 are sunk deeply into the soil of Genesis 12 and following, and that ancient promise is about to receive its contemporary fulfilment.

However, the *context* of the promise—'after the death of Moses' (v. 1)—is particularly significant. 'Moses my servant has died,' Yahweh says, 'and now, rise, cross over this Jordan ... into the land which I am giving to them' (v. 2). In order to appreciate this reference to Moses' death, one must remember the pentateuchal tradition of the greatness of Moses. Israel stood within an inch of her covenant death in Exodus 32–34; Moses was the only Israelite in covenant fellowship with Yahweh (this is the implication of Exodus 33:7–11 in context), and, as Israel's mediator, he attached their destiny to his (33:16). Unlike prophets in general, Moses received revelation from Yahweh in the most direct manner (Num. 12:1–8). Indeed, Deuteronomy 34:10–12 (the three verses right before Joshua) makes crystal clear how incomparable Moses was. There was no one like Moses; no one as great as Moses until the One greater than Moses came. And now Moses had died. You can imagine the dismay in Israel. Although you expected it, were informed of it, were prepared for it (Deut. 31), what do you do when *the* servant of God dies and a raging river lies between you and the land you are to inherit? (You might wonder if Moses died after all—he is mentioned eleven times in Joshua 1!) What do you have left when everything the first five books of the Bible have been preparing you for ends in a funeral?

It is against this background of the death of 'Moses the Incomparable' that the writer sets the continuity of Yahweh's promise. 'Moses my servant has died, so you must wait'? No. 'You must weep'? No. But, 'Rise, cross over ... into the land.' Moses may die; God's promise lives on. There is the passing of an era yet the endurance of the promise. Yahweh's fidelity does not hinge on the achievements of men, however gifted they may be, nor does it evaporate in the face of funerals or rivers.

The Encouragement of Yahweh's Presence (1:5, 9, 17)

Secondly, Joshua 1 highlights the encouragement of Yahweh's presence. 'I will be with you' (v. 5). It is interesting to note that these simple words were spoken once before to a very reticent, backward, excuse-making, ask-George-not-me sort of fellow, that is, Moses, in Exodus 3:12, when he was called to face both Israel and pharaoh. The same God now gives the same assurance in similar threatening circumstances to Joshua. Indeed, a case can be made for the name *Yahweh* being intended as theological (or devotional) shorthand for the implications and message of the statement 'I will be with you' (see Exod. 3:14–15 in light of 3:12). Hence Moses has died, but Yahweh has not changed. He is still Yahweh, the God who is *present* with his servant and his people to help and deliver (contrast Hos. 1:9).

It is because of this assurance that Yahweh can exhort Joshua to 'be strong and bold' (vv. 6, 7, 9). Joshua is not told to grit his teeth and screw up his courage on his own; he is to be strong only because Yahweh is with him (v. 9) and not because Yahweh prefers leaders who are positive thinkers. Note how this assurance keeps reappearing throughout the book (2:24; 3:7, 10; 4:14; 6:27; 10:14, 42; 13:6; 14:12; 21:44; 23:3, 10).

A contemporary Christian reader might see this and say that's all very nice for Joshua, but he was a noteworthy character; he had to lead all of Israel. What about the plain Christian like me? Is this promise for ordinary Christians? Look at the use of this promise in Hebrews 13:5–6:

Keep your life free from love of money,
and be content with what you have;
for he has said, 'I will never fail you nor forsake you.'
Hence we can confidently say,
'The Lord is my helper,
I will not be afraid;
what can man do to me?' [RSV.]

Here the promise of Joshua 1:5 is applied to a Christian congregation. The promise of God's abiding presence in Joshua 1 is also for you (note the 'for' in Hebrews 13:5b) and is the solution to the sin of covetousness and discontent, which in turn (note the 'hence' of Hebrews 13:6) leads to the great freedom of life without fear! There is nothing more essential for the people of God than to hear their God repeating to them amid all their changing circumstances, 'I will be with you' or 'I will not forsake you.'

The Centrality of Yahweh's Word (1:7–8)

The third theme we observe is the centrality of Yahweh's word. Joshua is commanded to be especially strong and bold 'to be careful to do according to all the torah (instruction) which Moses my servant commanded you' (v. 7). God does not withhold the formula that leads to such obedience: 'you shall meditate (mutter) over this torah document day and night, so that you will be careful to do according to all that is written in it' (v. 8). Constant, careful absorbing of the word of God leads to obedience to it. Lack of study results in

lack of obedience. Notice how the writer stresses this urgency of obedience to Yahweh's word in the last chapters as well (22:5; 23:6; cf. 8:30–35).

This command is given specifically to Joshua as the leader of God's people. Can we legitimately assume that it also obligates every Israelite or Christian? Yes. If we don't like Joshua 1:7–8, we still have to face Psalm 1:2, which describes what should be true of every godly believer (i.e. 'but his delight is in Yahweh's torah, and in his torah he meditates day and night'). There is no escape! Indeed, the torah should be our delight. Life in the kingdom of God must be lived out of the Word of God. Joshua 1 and Psalm 1 alike tell us that a life pleasing to God does not arise from mystical experiences or warm feelings or from a new gimmick advocated in a current release from one of our evangelical publishers; no, it comes from the word God has already spoken and from obedience to that word.

The Unity of Yahweh's People (1:12–18)

Finally, Joshua 1 uses much space to describe the unity of Yahweh's people. One might think there is little theological meat in these verses, but when they are read in light of Numbers 32 they take on new significance. When the two (or two and one-half) tribes request Moses to assign them an inheritance to the east of the Jordan, Moses suspects that their query hides a fresh conspiracy to abort the fulfilment of God's promise. In a flash of white heat he lambastes them as a 'brood of sinful men' (Num. 32:14), apparently content to possess their land now, sit out the Cis-jordan conquest, allow the other tribes to fend for themselves, and thus to discourage and dishearten (Num. 32:7) the majority of God's people. So, Moses says, there will be another Kadesh-barnea! Numbers 13–14 all over again! It is in the light of the peril of rebellion against Yahweh that the unity of God's people becomes so crucial (Num. 32:16–27).

Now perhaps we can see why the unity of all Israel portrayed in Joshua 1 was so critical. Here Reuben, Gad, and half-Manasseh are models of willing obedience and instruments of encouragement. Indifference on their part or snubbing their noses at the western tribes would have discouraged and disheartened the rest of God's people and led to rebellion and unbelief. It is interesting to note the concern for 'all Israel' throughout the Book of Joshua (chs. 3–4; chs. 7–8; 10:29ff.; 22:12, 16; 23:2; 24:1).

One can detect implications here for the doctrine and practice of the church—unity among God's people is no idle luxury. This does not mean that we have to feel all sticky and gooey about each other, but it does mean that we must care enough that we don't want any of the Lord's children to get discouraged. It seems that such caring encouragement should take place in our public meetings (Heb. 10:25; see a beautiful example in 1 Sam. 23:16). And it is crucial because, ultimately, unity is a prerequisite for fidelity.

So Moses has died. But Yahweh has not left Israel—or us—orphans; we still have God's promise, God's presence, God's Word, and God's people. And that should be enough until the kingdom of God comes in power and great glory.

The Promise of God and the Last Three Funerals (24:29–33)

These verses seem to be a rather dry-as-dust way to end an otherwise interesting book: an obituary column for a conclusion. However, we should ask why the writer closes his book this way. Does he want merely to supply burial details, provide a ‘where they are now’ section about the main cast, or furnish information so that relatives can find the right graves for Veterans’ Day each year? I propose that these are theological obituaries and that the writer has deliberately placed them at the end of the book to underscore his concerns.

The Veracity of Yahweh’s Promise

First, he emphasizes the veracity of Yahweh’s promise. Observe the places where Joshua, the bones of Joseph, and Eleazar are said to be buried (vv. 30, 32, 33). Obviously a definite location is given in each case, but the important point is that each of them is buried *in the land* that Yahweh promised them. They have died; but their tombstones are monuments to the fidelity of Yahweh to his promise of the land.

The reference to the ‘bones of Joseph’ is particularly interesting (v. 32). The Book of Genesis closes with Joseph clinging to God’s promise of the land. It is an astounding picture. Joseph is both over Egypt and in Egypt but certainly not of Egypt; for even as he dies his eyes are glued to another land, which Yahweh has promised. He is so taken with that promise—it is such a passion with him—that he requires his kin to take his bones to that land when God leads them out of Egypt (cf. Heb. 11:22), which they did (Exod. 13:19). And now (Josh. 24:32) they find their resting place.

A tremendous amount of time has elapsed since Abraham received the promise—500 to 600 years! But, so our writer avers, the passage of time does not void the promises of God. Joshua, Joseph, Eleazar—these, being dead, yet speak.

The Test for Yahweh’s People

Secondly, our writer hints at the test for Yahweh’s people. Verse 31 seems to be both positive and negative: ‘Israel served Yahweh all the days of Joshua and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had known all the work of Yahweh that he had done for Israel.’ Here is a record of fidelity and a hint of wavering. In this section we hear of the deaths of both Joshua and Eleazar. The Book of Joshua constantly links Eleazar and Joshua (14:1; 17:4; 19:51; 21:1) just as the Pentateuch links Aaron and Moses. Thus the deaths of Eleazar and Joshua signify the complete passing of that conquest generation. So the question lingers: Whither Israel? Will Israel still serve Yahweh now that Joshua and Eleazar and the elders are gone? In verse 31 the writer already seems to see the situation of Judges 2:10 and fears the answer is no. (Maybe that’s why he wrote this book—to depict the fidelity of Yahweh so that a wavering Israel might respond in kind before it was too late.)

Can the church remain faithful after the eyewitnesses are gone? That is no small test. Here is the continual danger of second-generation religion: Will we remain warm and faithful without the gentle pressure of our spiritual mentors on whom we once leaned? Although we ourselves have not seen the cutting off of the Jordan and the crumbling of Jericho, can we still cling to the God who did these acts?

The Need for Yahweh's Victory

Third, perhaps we are not wrong in seeing here the need for Yahweh's victory. True, these graves witness to the fulfilment of Yahweh's promise and yet there is an incompleteness, a tragedy about it, since it is marked by death. Why does Israel's saga of faith and life have to keep closing its chapters with death notices? Genesis ends with Joseph's death. Deuteronomy ends with Moses' death. The Book of Joshua ends with Joshua's death. Is this not the sting of sin we see here amid the fidelity of God? Is this not a sign of the wrath of God against us (Ps. 90:9, 11–12)? How much better when the One who 'abolished death' (2 Tim. 1:10) causes the last chapters to shimmer with resurrection (Matt. 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20–21).¹

Exalting Jesus in Matthew by David Platt

Matthew 28:16-20

In Matthew 28:16–20 we come to the conclusion of a journey with Jesus, a journey that began with His birth and has continued through His life, His teaching, His miracles, His death, and in the previous section of Matthew 28, His resurrection. Now in this final passage in Matthew's Gospel, we come to what has been called the Great Commission, a commission given by the Lord Jesus to those early disciples and to all His followers in subsequent generations. It's a call we need to hear afresh in our own day.

The Great Commission was not simply meant to be analyzed, though there is much here to think through. These few verses ought to, by the working of God's Spirit, awaken our hearts, both individually and collectively in our churches, with a renewed zeal to make disciples in our own communities and among all nations. For some followers of Christ, this might even result in going to an unreached people group to make known the glory of Christ.

¹ Dale Ralph Davis, [*Joshua: No Falling Words*](#), Focus on the Bible Commentary (Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2000), 15–23.

One commentator has referred to Matthew 28:16–20 as “the climax and major focal point not only of this gospel but of the entire New Testament. It is not an exaggeration to say that, in its broadest sense, it is the focal point of all Scripture, Old Testament as well as New” (MacArthur, *Matthew 24–28*, 329). Whether or not it can truly be said that this passage is “*the* focal point of all Scripture” is up for debate, but at the very least this is a reminder of the extreme significance of Jesus’ final words in this Gospel. In verse 16 the 11 disciples met Jesus in Galilee, just as He directed in verse 10. Matthew tells us that the disciples worshiped Jesus, though “some doubted” (v. 17). It was in this setting that the resurrected Lord Jesus gave us the Great Commission of verses 18–20.

Matthew’s point in writing this book was not only to show us that Jesus is King; if that were the case, he would have stopped in the middle of chapter 28 after the resurrection. Instead, Matthew ends by telling us how Jesus sent out His disciples to proclaim Jesus as King to the ends of the earth, and that’s a story that continues even today. The beauty of this text is that you and I are a part of this story; we are disciples of Jesus the King, commissioned and sent out by Him to proclaim His life, death, and resurrection all over the planet. There are three implications for followers of Jesus based on this text and in light of all that we’ve seen so far in the Gospel of Matthew.

We Will Believe in the Authority of Christ

MATTHEW 28:18

As Jesus gathers His disciples on this mountain, He doesn’t start with a command; He starts with a claim: “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (v. 18). We have here the fulfillment of Daniel’s prophecy centuries earlier, when the prophet spoke of a “son of man” (Dan 7:13) in this way:

*He was given authority to rule,
and glory, and a kingdom;
so that those of every people,
nation, and language
should serve Him.
His dominion is an everlasting dominion
that will not pass away,
and His kingdom is one
that will not be destroyed. (Dan 7:14)*

Jesus’ authority is *the* basis for everything else that follows in this text. His authority over heaven and earth means that **Jesus is not just the personal Lord and Savior over us**. We often speak of the moment of our conversion by saying, “I decided to make Jesus my personal Lord and Savior.” While there is

much truth to that statement, we need to be careful not to miss the point of Christ's lordship. As we've already seen, you and I don't *decide* to make Jesus Lord; He is Lord regardless of what we think of Him. Jesus died on the cross and rose from the grave, and now He is exalted at the Father's right hand as the Lord over all creation. All those things are true regardless of what you and I think or decide. Philippians 2:9–11 speaks to this truth in no uncertain terms:

For this reason God highly exalted Him and gave Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow—of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth—and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

One day every knee is going to bow and every tongue is going to confess, "Jesus is Lord"—that's a guarantee. So will you confess Jesus as Lord now, or will you confess Him as Lord when it is too late?

Further, while Jesus saves us personally, loves us personally, and rules over us personally, He is not *only* the personal Lord and Savior over you, me, or any one people group. Instead, **Jesus is the universal Lord and Savior over all.** Christ died to save people from every nation and tongue and tribe (Rev 7:9). This worldwide purpose was life-changing for these Jewish disciples who were following a Jewish Messiah. From the beginning of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus' Jewish heritage has been highlighted, beginning with Abraham and then running through the line of David, king of Israel (Matt 1:1). Jesus was born King of the Jews. Nevertheless, Jesus was intent on showing His Jewish disciples that He was not simply their Lord and King, but Lord and King over all nations.

Throughout Matthew's Gospel we have seen Jesus' universal lordship. Consider some of the ways this has played out in these 28 chapters.

He has authority over nature and nations. Jesus calmed the sea with a rebuke (8:26), showing His mastery over nature. His authority over nations is one of the central themes of the Great Commission, since all peoples are to be His disciples.

He has authority over disease and demons. When Jesus speaks, the blind see, the lame walk, lepers are healed, and disease is gone (4:23–24). He speaks, and demons flee (8:28–34).

He has authority over sin and death. As the Son of God, Jesus has authority to forgive sin against God (9:1–7). He also has authority to overcome man's ultimate enemy, death, which is the payment for sin (28:1–10).

He has authority over our lives. Jesus' authority extends to every individual, which for us means dying to self (16:24–25). For the believer, there should be a glad submission to the lordship of Jesus. This means, in relation to the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18–20, that we must be open to whatever the Lord calls us to, including serving Him in another cultural context.

He has authority over every life. Jesus has authority over every life in this world (25:31–33), and this is why we seek to make disciples of all nations.

Obedience to the Great Commission isn't a man-made program, nor is it our own willpower that leads us to go. **Jesus' authority compels us to go**, for missions only makes sense if He has all authority in heaven and on earth. However, we don't go reluctantly, as if we're being forced to follow just any king. **His worth is the fuel of our mission.** In other words, we go because Jesus is worthy of the worship of every person on the planet. Our Savior deserves all praise (Rev 5:9–10), so we long to hear all people confess, "Jesus is Lord!" This also reminds us that **His worship is the goal of our mission.** Followers of Christ live for the day when every tribe and tongue and people and nation gather around our God to give Him the global glory that He is due (Rev 7:9–10).

While the Great Commission certainly compels us to go, even to difficult places, we're not left on our own in this mission. **Jesus' authority gives us confidence as we go.** Who are we to go to another people group, or even coworkers, and tell them that they are following false idols, and that if they don't turn to Jesus, they will die forever? The world views this as arrogant, and even as far as many people in the church are concerned, communicating this to people makes no sense. However, if Matthew's Gospel is true—that is, if Jesus died on the cross for the sins of the world, if He rose from the grave in victory over sin and death, and if there is no one like Him and He reigns as Lord over all—then telling a lost world about Jesus is the only thing that makes sense! What doesn't make sense is millions of Christians sitting back and saying nothing to the nations. Instead, we ought to go with confidence, knowing that the One who sent us is sovereign over all and worthy of worship from all.

One of the promises we have as we engage a lost world with the good news of Jesus Christ is that **this gospel will save.** This is true no matter where we are or how unlikely it may seem that someone will believe our message. I was recently in a Hindu home in the middle of an Indian slum with Hindu gods all over the walls. When I shared the good news of Christ, a Hindu woman whose family for generations had never even heard the gospel responded, "I believe in Jesus, and I want Him to save me." I was reminded that this gospel is powerful, and it will save. Do we believe that?

In addition to having confidence in the saving power of the gospel, we can have confidence on a larger scale concerning Christ's purposes for the church. **His mission will succeed** because His authority guarantees it. After Jesus spoke His final words to the disciples, He ascended to heaven (Acts 1:9) where He now sits at the right hand of the Father. Now in His exalted position, Jesus empowers His people, directing, guiding, and providing them with everything they need to bring this mission to completion. Matthew 24:14 is a guarantee: "This good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed in all the world as a testimony to all nations. And then the end will come." We are on the front lines of a spiritual battle that is raging for the souls of men and women around the world, and the all-sovereign Son of God, our Savior, is in command of a commission that will be accomplished. This leads us to the next part of this passage.

We Will Obey the Command of Christ

MATTHEW 28:19

After telling us of His authority over heaven and earth, the next words out of Jesus' mouth are, "Go, therefore" (v. 19). It is as if He's saying, "In light of My authority, go!" Here is Jesus' full command in verses 19–20:

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 everything I have commanded you.

This is not a comfortable call inviting most Christians to come, be baptized, and sit in one location. Yet, that is exactly what we are tempted to turn our mission into, and if we are not careful, this is what our Christianity will consist of. We may come to a worship service, participate in the life of the church, serve in the church, and give regularly, all the while neglecting to make disciples. The church is filled with people who have been Christians for 5, 10, 15, or even 50 years, who have never led someone outside of their family to be a reproducing disciple. We have missed our mission. In his penetrating book, *Born to Reproduce*, Dawson Trotman comments on our tendency in the church today:

The curse of today is that we are too busy. I am not talking about being busy earning money to buy food. I am talking about being busy doing Christian things. We have spiritual activity with little productivity.

Trotman continues,

The Gospel spread to the known world during the first century without radio, television or the printing press, because [the writings of the apostles] produced men who were reproducing. But today we have a lot of pew-sitters—people think that if they are faithful in church attendance, put good-sized gifts into the offering plate and get people to come, they have done their part.... If I were a minister of a church and had deacons or elders to pass the plate and choir members to sing, I would say, "Thank God for your help. We need you. Praise the Lord for these extra things you do," but I would keep pressing home the big job—"Be fruitful and multiply." All these other things are incidental to the supreme task of winning a man or woman to Jesus Christ and then helping him or her to go on.

if Matthew 28:19 is not a comfortable call for most Christians, then what is it? **This is a costly command directing every Christian to go, baptize, and make disciples of all nations.** This has been the plan from the beginning. In Jesus' initial introduction to the disciples in this Gospel, He said, "Follow Me ... and I will make you fish for people!" (Matt 4:19). From the very beginning, Jesus made clear that everyone who followed Him would fish for men. Consider how

Matthew 28 serves as a fitting conclusion to this initial meeting between Jesus and His disciples in Matthew 4:

- Jesus' introduction in Matthew 4: Every follower of Jesus is a fisher of men.
- Jesus' conclusion in Matthew 28: Every disciple is a disciple-maker.

According to Jesus, from beginning to end, to *be* a disciple is to *make* disciples. Scripture knows nothing of disciples who aren't making disciples. Yet, if you were to ask Christians today what it means to make disciples, you'd likely get jumbled thoughts, ambiguous answers, and probably even some blank stares. Consequently, we urgently need biblical guidance on this foundational command.

There's one imperative verb in Matthew 28:19—"make disciples"—and it is surrounded by three participles: going, baptizing, and teaching. Based on this verse, we'll look at four non-negotiable facets of disciple making.

First, **we share the Word**. This is absolutely foundational to making disciples. **We speak about the gospel as we live according to the gospel**. The Spirit of God lives inside God's people so that they can bear witness to the gospel to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). The evangelistic strategy of the church is built upon every member of the church engaging the world with the gospel.

Yet making disciples doesn't end when people respond to the gospel. When people turn from their sin to Christ, we baptize them. This is another part of making disciples—**we show the Word**. Baptism is a part of what it means to make disciples because **baptism symbolizes identification with the person of Christ and inclusion in the body of Christ**. Every disciple of Jesus is baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (v. 19). This is a command of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The number of people who say they are Christians today but have not been baptized is, quite frankly, shocking. If you are a follower of Christ and have not been baptized, you are living in direct disobedience to Christ. The New Testament knows nothing of unbaptized Christians. It's not that one has to be baptized in order to *become* a Christian, but once you are a Christian, your public declaration of faith in Christ *necessarily* involves baptism. To neglect baptism is to dishonor and disobey Christ. In fact, if you continue to be unrepentant in this area, refusing to identify with Christ in baptism, then there is serious reason to question whether or not you are a Christian at all.

Once someone is baptized, showing the word involves sharing life together as a member of the church. Disciple making is not simply what happens in a classroom for an hour or so each week; it's what happens when we walk through life together as a community of faith, modeling for one another how to follow Christ. We show one another how to pray, how to study God's Word, how to grow in Christ, and how to lead others to Christ. This is what Christ's body is to be about.

Third, as we make disciples, **we teach the Word**. Jesus speaks of “teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you” (v. 19). **We don’t just receive the Word; we reproduce the Word**. God has certainly gifted some in the church to teach, especially elders (Titus 1:9; see also 1 Tim 3:2; Jas 3:1). However, every disciple of Jesus should saturate their words with God’s Word. Our conversations ought to be filled with Scripture as we teach people all that Christ has taught us.

Fourth and finally, making disciples means that **we serve the world**. Jesus speaks of making disciples of “all nations,” a phrase which in the original (*panta ta ethne*) refers not simply to nations or countries as we usually think of them, but rather to tribes, families, clans, and peoples, what we call “people groups” today. The Old Testament refers to such people groups: Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, etc. Today there are more than 11,000 people groups spread throughout the world. These groups share similar language, heritage, and cultural characteristics. So **this is not just a general command to make disciples among as many people as possible**. Rather, **this is a specific command to make disciples among every people group in the world**. There are, as of this writing, more than 6,000 people groups who have still not been reached with the gospel. Therefore, obedience to the Great Commission necessarily involves intentionality in going after these 6,000 people groups.

In light of the massive needs and the commission Christ has given us, **may we make disciples and multiply churches** in our neighborhoods and among all peoples. We live in a world of sin, rebellion, suffering, and pain, a world where over three billion people live on less than \$2 a day, and a billion of those people live in desperate poverty. Hundreds of millions are starving and dying of preventable diseases. Yet the spiritual condition of the world is even worse: billions of people across the world are engrossed in false religions, and approximately two billion of them have never even had a chance to hear the gospel. According to Scripture, they are all on a road that leads to an eternal hell. Yet as believers, we know that Jesus is Lord and that He has died on the cross for our sins and risen from the grave. The Spirit of God has opened our hearts to see and to believe. He has saved us to know God and to enjoy Him, and very soon we will be with Him forever in heaven. But while we’re here, God has given us His Spirit for one purpose: We have been charged with reaching the world with the gospel.

We Will Depend On the Presence of Christ

MATTHEW 28:20

Finally, after seeing that we must believe in the authority of Christ and obey the command of Christ, we get the assurance in Matthew 28:20 that we can depend on the presence of Christ. The final words of this Gospel are comforting and encouraging, and they remind us of Matthew’s description of Jesus in the

first chapter: “See, the virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will name Him Immanuel, which is translated ‘God is with us’ ” (1:23). It is fitting, then, that Matthew would close His Gospel with Jesus’ words, “And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (28:20).

Be encouraged, follower of Christ, for **this mission is not based on who we are or what we can do**. This mission is assured based on Christ’s presence through His Spirit. When I first came to the church I now pastor, I recall thinking that the church had such potential with all of its gifts and resources. But that’s not a biblical mind-set. It doesn’t matter how gifted a church is or how blessed it is materially, for the people of God can do nothing apart from power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). However, when the Spirit works among a people, that church can shake the nations for God’s glory.

Rather than being based on what we can do, **this mission is based on who Jesus is and what He is able to do in and through our lives**. Christ is able to do “beyond all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us” (Eph 3:20). Oh, how we need to put aside small dreams and worldly ambitions. We need to give Christ a blank check with our lives and then see where He leads.

Together, let’s experience the power of His presence with us. We want to be a part of something that is beyond us, something that requires supernatural strength. We don’t want to be preoccupied with programs and practices that we can manage on our own. We should be desperate for the power of Jesus.

We know that obedience to the Great Commission will not be easy, and we know it will be costly. But we also know that it will be worth it. Jesus will return and His reward will be infinitely greater than any cost we have paid. So **together, let’s hope in the promise of His return for us**. The kingdom of our Lord Jesus will one day be fully and finally established, and we will see His face (Rev 22:4). We are living—and longing—for that day. Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!²

² David Platt, [*Exalting Jesus in Matthew*](#), ed. Daniel L. Akin, David Platt, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2013), Mt 28:16–20.