

Make Disciples
Matthew 28:16-20
Pastor Francis Bezzam

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷ And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. ¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ 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, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Matthew 28:16-20

Best-selling author Stephen Covey is known for saying “begin with the end in mind”. He suggests developing habits that include having a “clear understanding of your destination”.

Two thousand years ago, Jesus had in mind the literal end of human history when he gave the Great Commission to his disciples.

In verse twenty, which is the last verse of the last chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus promises his disciples that he is with them to the “*end of the age*”. Jesus used this phrase “*end of the age*” five times in the Gospel of Matthew.

What did Jesus have in mind?

Jesus used this phrase to describe the consummation, fulfillment, completion of life as we know it on this earth. In God’s mind, this is a future date, has not happened yet, but this is the date when Jesus will return and judge the world.

Matter of fact, the early disciples of Jesus asked him this question in Matthew chapter twenty-four – “*Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?*” Matthew 24:3

“And Jesus answered them, “See that no one leads you astray. ⁵ For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray. ⁶ And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. ⁷ For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. ⁸ All these are but the beginning of the birth pains. ⁹ “Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. ¹⁰ And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. ¹¹ And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. ¹² And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. ¹³ But the one who endures to the end will be saved. ¹⁴ And this gospel of the

kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” Matthew 24:4-14

Jesus also described the “end of the age” twice in Matthew thirteen.

“The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. ⁴⁰ Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. ⁴¹ The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, ⁴² and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³ Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear”. Matthew 13:39-43

Here is second mention:

⁴⁷ “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. ⁴⁸ When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad. ⁴⁹ So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous ⁵⁰ and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Matthew 13:47-50

What does the end of the age look like? Both terrible and wonderful. Wonderful for the disciples of Jesus and terrible for non-followers. Jesus came the first time as Savior of the world. Jesus will return a second time both as Judge and Savior. As Judge of the unrighteous and as Savior of the righteous.

So these eleven disciples knew exactly what Jesus meant when he said, “*I am with you to the end of the age*”.

All the early disciples, Peter, James, John and the rest all have died. But these made newer disciples who made other disciples. And those disciples made other disciples and here we are two thousand years later and the end has not yet come. But we hear about wars and rumors of war. We hear about famine. We hear about earthquakes – terrible quakes, one recently in Myanmar. And we hear about deceivers predicting dates for Jesus’ return. No one knows the date of Jesus’ coming. We also hear about Christian deconstruction these days. But Jesus said that those who endure till the end will be saved from God’s terrifying judgment.

So, while we wait for Jesus’ return, Jesus has given us a mandate, a mission to carry out. The mission is to “Make Disciples”.

This is the only command in this passage. The rest of the verbs are participles – ongoing activity. Things we do in light of the command to make disciples.

All our preaching, our teaching, our witnessing, our praying, our serving, our gathering is to make disciples.

Let's begin with the definition of a disciple and share some attributes about disciples. And then look at the one command we must all take seriously from our Lord Jesus Christ.

Who is a disciple?

1. A disciple *denies* self to *gain* Christ

Years ago, I was in a discipleship training and the trainer said we know someone is a disciple when he or she makes another disciple. That is surely the implication. But we don't begin there. We begin with Jesus' definition of a disciple. The verbal form of the noun disciple simply means to *learn*. In the Matthew 11:29, Jesus says "*learn from me*" or "*follow me*".

- A disciple of Jesus Christ is someone who learns to deny self. Jesus says in Matthew chapter 16, verse 24 "*if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me*".
- Luke's Gospel records this way in Luke 9:23, "*If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me*". Being disciple of Jesus Christ implies daily self-denial.
- What does self-denial look like? Jesus gives us several filters in the Gospel of Luke to tell us who is *not* a disciple. Here are at least *three* filters:
- Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, ²⁶ "*If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.* ²⁷ *Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.* ²⁸ *For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it?* ²⁹ *Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him,* ³⁰ *saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.'* ³¹ *Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand?* ³² *And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace.* ³³ *So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.*" Luke 14:25-32
- Is Jesus telling you to literally *hate* your own family? Obviously not. Because Jesus also taught, "Honor our father and mother" (Matthew 19:19). Jesus is using *hyperbole* to describe who must be first. To become a disciple, you must learn to

hate whatever offends God and love God. Jesus must be first. Also, Is Jesus telling you to deny yourself to the point of extinction, annihilation, or oblivion? No. To deny self is to deny your will, your self-righteousness, your sin, your sinful desires and everything about you that makes you the first and Jesus second.

- A disciple means daily self-denial and following Jesus for life. Jesus did not give any false impressions about discipleship. In John 6:66, John tells us that “*many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him*”. Why? Because Jesus made plain and clear to them the cost of discipleship. Jesus demands whole-hearted followers not seasonal or half-hearted followers.
- Puritan Thomas Watson said, “*Self-denial is the foundation of godliness, and if this is not well laid, all the building will fall*”.
- In Matthew 11:29, Jesus said, “*Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls*”. So, a disciple is someone who denies self but gains the joy of Christ. There is a supernatural rest and joy you gain in following Christ.
- Let’s look at our passage for some attributes of a disciple.

2. A disciple worships Christ

- Verse 16 and 17. *Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷ And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted.*
- Verse 16 is the aftermath of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the promised Messiah, the Savior of the world. Jesus was born of Mary, a virgin, by the power of God. Jesus grew up and gathered disciples. 12 of them, and one of them betrayed him. Jesus went to the cross, willingly, died for sinners, was buried, rose again from the dead on the third day. And after his resurrection, here is Jesus who had directed his disciples to meet him at the mountain. Right after the resurrection, you see the women had been looking for a dead Jesus but were told this – “*⁶ He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. ⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you..*” So the women send a message to the disciples. And here they are at the mountain at Galilee. Verse 17 tells us they saw him (Jesus) and what did they do?

They worshiped him.

In Matthew 28:9, you see the posture of these women who saw the risen Christ. They all took hold of his feet and worshipped him. Perhaps the disciples saw him from a distance, but when they saw Jesus, they two fell down, prostrate and worshipped him. Christ is worthy of worship, and every disciple must worship him. A disciple’s habit is to worship and adore Christ. Do you see Christ as

beautiful as a wonderful savior?

Zechariah 9:17 tells us “How great is his goodness, and how great his beauty!”.

When Jesus comes into your life, there is a holy loving beauty that satisfies so deeply that nothing else in this world can. And the beauty of Christ grows with age. The early disciples loved Christ and adored Christ and so must we!

- Now, Matthew adds another peculiar detail at the end of verse 17 that some doubted. We’re not told what they doubted. It could also mean they hesitated. Were there more people or is it just *eleven*? We don’t know, but we know that when Peter wanted to walk on water, he hesitated. Same word for doubted. Jesus is very likely at a distance because the next verse tells us that Jesus came near. We don’t know if their doubts were cleared but isn’t it wonderful that Jesus comes near to you when you have doubts. The book of James tells us “*draw near to God and he will draw near to you.*” James 4:8.

Second attribute of a disciple of Jesus Christ.

3. A disciple *considers* and *submits* to the authority of Christ

- *Verse 18. And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.*
- Notice, the *extent* and the *scope* of the authority Jesus has. Jesus’s authority is not to be understood as someone who has political authority or civil authority but as someone who has authority at a celestial level and at a supernatural level. Jesus has an authority that defies human logic. Jesus says he has *all* authority. 1) The *extent* of Jesus’ authority is not limited to what kings, rulers, emperors or monarchs have by virtue of their inheritance or by virtue of their conquest or coercion of other lands and people. 2) The *extent* of Jesus’ authority is not limited to what elected officials, like Prime Ministers, Presidents or Governors have by virtue of their being elected in a democratic system of government. For example, Pilate, the governor of Judea was a man with authority. Pilate told Jesus that he had authority to release Jesus. And what did Jesus say in his response to Pilate? Jesus answered him, “*You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above*”. (John 19:11). Who talks like that? A madman or someone who has an authority beyond a humanly defined scale. The extent of Jesus authority is something no man can wield or is capable of wielding. Jesus’s authority is from God. Jesus had authority to lay down his life and raise it up. To give life to the dead. The people with power and authority in this world – they can abuse their authority to put you in prison and sentence you and see you killed but no one can bring the dead to life. Also, notice the *scope* of this authority. In heaven and in earth. I suppose you could travel to the farther planet and those planets bend to the authority of Jesus. This level of authority is simply astounding. Heaven is God’s

throne and the earth is his footstool (Isaiah 66:1). The author of Hebrews says “*he (Jesus) upholds the universe by the word of his power.*” Hebrews 1:3

And it is in the light of this authority, Jesus commands his disciples to make disciples.

4. A disciple must *make* other disciples under the authority of Christ
 - *Verse 19 and 20. ¹⁹ 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, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*”
 - The word “go” is a participle just as *baptizing* and *teaching* are. The only central command here is the word “*make disciples*”.

How are you to make disciples?

 - Observe his commandments
 - Baptize
 - Teach what Jesus has taught

So, a disciple of Jesus worships and adores Christ. A disciple of Jesus submits to the authority of Christ. As disciples of Jesus, Jesus authorizes you to make other disciples of all nations.

What incentive or assurance does Jesus offer you to obey his command?
And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

5. Do you *believe* the promise of Christ?
 Then go and make disciples!

In conclusion, let’s consider Jesus himself.

Jesus came not to do his own will but the will of His Father.

Jesus is fully God and fully man but he willingly became a disciple of His Father.

He denied himself and obeyed his Father.

Jesus was humiliated and crucified for no wrong of his but for yours.

Jesus bled and died for the sin of others - for those who see his death as payment for their sin. Jesus died for those who repent and turn to him as the Savior of their soul and Lord of their life.

If you have never seen Jesus this way, then God’s will for you is to repent and trust in Jesus Christ – his death and his resurrection. This is how you become a disciple.

“*Unless we deny our own will, we shall never do God’s will*”. Thomas Watson

----- Discipleship Questions-----

MESSAGE SUMMARY: Mission: Make Disciples. Matthew 28:16-20

HEAD: These questions help you examine the truth of God's Word.

1. What characterizes a disciple of Jesus Christ? What is the mandate for every disciple of Jesus Christ? Mathew 16:24, Mark 8:34, Luke 9:23, Luke 14:25-32

HEART: These questions help you wrestle with what you believe.

2. Do you believe disciple making is for every disciple? Why or why not?
3. What is God convicting you of and to believe in light of this message?

HANDS/HABITS: These questions help you bring the truth into your everyday life and develop behaviors that change your habits.

4. For personal reflection: What will you change to be a better disciple and make disciples of Christ?