

Make Disciples

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[0 : 0 0] Okay, I know today is a one-off kind of series, but as we would have it, it actually follows! on from last Sunday's passage, because we were looking at the resurrection, and lo and behold, we get to this final section. So rather fortuitous or well-planned, one of the two. Now, I wonder whether you've ever wondered what happens when you're reading a book, or, you know, not wondered, but dreamt about what might happen after the end of a story, or if you watch a long movie, and they lived happily ever after in the final scene, what happens next? I'm sure some of you have experienced it yourself recently, perhaps you've had your own wedding, you finished year 12 or graduated from university, and, you know, that period was really a hard slog, wasn't it? So much planning, anxiety, drama even, to the end. And then finally, it's all done. You know, let's say it's the wedding, wonderful celebration. Everyone's on a high at the reception. The bride and groom head back to their honeymoon suite, or whatever. And it was all great. And then, they head off on their honeymoon, and somewhere through it, they look at each other and go, what's next? Where do we go from here?

Now, I'm sure, you know, many of you will know where you go from here after you've got married. Life begins together, doesn't it? The hard work, in a sense, begins. Well, last Sunday was Easter Sunday, and in a sense, that was the climax, wasn't it, of Jesus's life. What joy it was for the disciples and the women to see Jesus risen to life, just as he promised. And then, I guess, today, the question is, what next? Well, if you recall last week, the angel and Jesus had taught Mary, the two Marys, to instruct the disciples to meet Jesus in Galilee, that is, north in Palestine, far from where he was crucified in Jerusalem. Jesus had indeed promised to meet them there after he was risen from the dead. But why? What for? To start a commune, maybe? So they can live together as one big happy family, happy family, singing Kumbaya around the far place. Or if, you know, it's us 5pm camp people playing card games like The Mind all the time, being one. Is Jesus about to create an idyllic community of heaven on earth for them?

Well, as we read in our final section tonight, the answer is no. Because it says, the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go, and when they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted. Now, why Galilee and not Jerusalem? Why make them go all the way up there? I think it's probably for practical reasons. The risen Jesus would have attracted too much attention, as a celebrity, perhaps. And Jesus had other priorities.

Now, incidentally, this isn't the first time that Jesus has appeared to them. Because if you look at John and Luke's Gospel, he had already appeared to them behind closed doors. Once, if you recall, without Thomas, and then another time, with Thomas there. But now, it is in Galilee that they are to meet Jesus, on a mountain, unspecified, probably outside in the outdoors.

Now, if you look at the Bible, mountaintop experiences are significant, both in the Old Testament and in the Gospels as well here. So, we have in Exodus that God summoned Israel to Mount Sinai and met Moses there to give them the Ten Commandments. When you read the Major and the Minor Prophets, they all speak often of Israel and the nations coming to God's holy mountain, Zion, to see him, to worship him, to hear him speak, and then to experience all the blessings that come with knowing God. Here, as well, in the Gospel of Matthew, we've already seen a few mountaintop experiences. Jesus, for example, gave his famous sermon on the mount, correct? And when Jesus went up to the mountain one time with three disciples and was transfigured, God appeared to them with Moses and Elijah. And so now, again, we have another mountaintop experience, except this time it's with all eleven disciples, and this time God the Father doesn't appear, because

[5 : 07] Jesus himself is God. Now, interestingly, we also read that while some worshipped him as God, others doubted. I don't think it's a total unbelief, but perhaps maybe a hesitation as to, wow, is this really the risen Lord? And if that is the case, what does that all mean? And so, God the Son Jesus speaks again, and this time declaring what we now know to be the Great Commission in verse 18. So look there, 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, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded. And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age. So that's the end of the reading. But what I want to do now, spend the rest of the talk, is to just unpack each element of this key statement. And first, we read that Jesus declares that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him. And if you're paying attention to the Daniel 7 reading, you can hear the echoes, can't you? There in chapter 7, we have the scene of the heavenly throne of God, and a Son of Man appears in verse 14 as we read on the slide. He is given authority, glory, and sovereign power. All nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. I wonder whether you can pick up the similar words there in the

Matthew passage as well. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed. So Jesus really is announcing that he is this Son of Man. And he's not doing this to show off, as to say, hey, look at me, see how powerful I am now, you know, how great. Rather, he declares his authority for a purpose. He announces, he's announcing that with his work on the cross complete, his righteousness vindicated by the Father who raised him from the dead, he is now declared as God's righteous king, Israel's promised Messiah sent by God from heaven. Now, Jesus has, not Jesus, the Son has always been God, right?

Ruling with the Father over all creation. But with his resurrection, his true identity can now be unveiled to all humanity, together with his completed work to show as his CV.

And all authority is now given to Jesus for the purpose and the task of bringing all nations under God's rule and authority. This is God's plan for his Messiah. Jesus was never going to be just Israel's king, but he was always God's ruler of the entire world, over all humanity.

He didn't just come to save the Jews, but the entire world. And so his dominion extends to every inch and territory on earth and in heaven. With his resurrection complete, the time has now come for everyone, without exception, to fall under his rule. Everyone needs to know that he is their rightful ruler.

[8 : 48] But the way Jesus is going to go about it is not by using armies or chariots or horses or guns or tanks. Instead, he will do so by drawing them to him in willing and joyful submission, out of thanksgiving for his sacrifice, in obedience to him, not as a response of fear, but by faith.

I wonder whether you've ever asked yourself why the risen Jesus didn't simply just remain on earth afterwards. It would have made everyone's job easier, wouldn't it?

Right? No one could doubt his power. No one could deny that he was the Son of God. For us to share about Jesus would be so easy.

Just say, here he is. Right? Well, the fact of the matter is that he did do that the first time, didn't he? And still people didn't believe. But more than that, I think, Jesus' desire really is for people to come to him, not with sight, but by faith.

That is, not out of compulsion and coercion because they have no choice, but because they believe. To do it willingly. Not just at the first time of asking, but also then to keep, continue to walk by faith.

[10 : 13] To keep believing in Jesus throughout their life. Doing good, serving him out of love for him, not because they have no choice.

Because they're forced to. And so we now read in verse 19 that Jesus grows his kingdom, not by conquest, but through discipleship.

And this is the task he now leaves for his disciples. Initially, for the 11 that were there, but of course then, for all of us as well. Go and make disciples of all nations.

That is the task. Now, the main verb here is to make disciples. The go is a verb as well, but it's in one sense consequential.

What do I mean by that? Let me give you an example. Perhaps you may have been involved or heard a fellow student involved in an argument, or, you know, not an argument, but sort of a disagreement with your teacher.

[11 : 16] And, you know, the student is being stubborn, doesn't want to do as they are told. And so, you know, they try and wriggle out of it, find any excuse to avoid it. And you can tell, because whatever the reason the teacher gives or says, they'll always find another answer, a question or excuse as a comeback.

And so, eventually, the teacher loses patience, right? And she will then say, just go and do it. Just go and do what I say. Now, the just go is an instruction, but it's not the main action, is it?

Because if the student then said, oh, that's fine, I'll just go. And then I'll come back and I'll say, I've done half of what you asked me to. I've gone. I didn't do what you wanted me to do, but I've actually gone and come back.

Now, of course, the teacher is not going to be happy with that, right? It's as good as not obeying. So, that is the same thing here. The point of the goal is not to go, but actually to make disciples and having to go, because that's the only way to make disciples.

So, if you look at your newsletter, I know we have the verb go as the first thing in our vision statement. But really, the goal there is simply to enable us to gather and grow in Christ.

[12 : 37] What it's saying to us and reminding us is that we cannot sit on our hands and expect people to just come. Even though, by God's grace, people do come. Rather, we have to take the initiative to go into our neighborhoods, to go to our friendship groups and family connections, and indeed go to the whole world and, like we've just done, support and pray for other Christians, missionaries, or gospel partners who do go physically in order to make disciples.

As for the original disciples, 11, they too had to go and make disciples. And what Jesus was saying to them is that they cannot be content with just remaining with the Jews and sharing the good news with them.

Because Jesus' authority extends to all nations. And so, they had to go to all nations. Now, what does making disciples then involve?

Well, Jesus spells it out very clearly in the next sentence. There are two aspects. The first, to baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit. And then the second, to teach them to obey all that Jesus has commanded.

Now, there's been quite a bit of talk over the last few days about baptism. And so, because the word is here, I'm going to do a bit of a segue and talk firstly about baptism.

[13 : 57] I think here, this reference is to water baptism. But also, because it's being done in the name of the Spirit, there is an aspect of that which involves baptism of the Holy Spirit as well.

Now, of course, as disciples, we can only baptize with water. Right? We cannot baptize with the Spirit because that is God's initiative, something that He can do alone.

And baptism of the Holy Spirit only occurs when we put our faith in Jesus. But it occurs the moment we do, that when we believe in Jesus, we're given the Holy Spirit in our lives at that point.

That's what the baptism of the Spirit entails. Now, it can, but it doesn't need to be accompanied by miraculous signs like speaking in tongues. So, we do read about that in Acts, but it's not normative for every Christian.

We also know that when we read in Acts, we discover that the disciples, when they obey this command, it is recorded that they actually only baptize in Jesus' name.

[15 : 06] So, this Trinitarian formula is actually not recorded in Acts, of baptizing in Father, Son, and Spirit. I think that means that we don't actually need to get too caught up in the exact wording.

This is not some kind of magic spell where Jesus says, all you have to do is go through this mechanical process of pouring water or dunking someone into water and then saying the magic words and then they become disciples.

Rather, water baptism symbolizes something more important, the initiation of a person into Jesus' kingdom. And it's recorded here that it's to be done in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit because then it makes the identity of the person that we worship clear.

So, it's not done in just the name of God, any old name, any old deity, but it's done in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit to clearly reveal to us that the person, the God that we are meant to be baptizing into is the God of the Old and New Testament, where the Son is none other than Jesus.

Now, the Jews in Jesus' day actually did perform or practice a form of baptism. It was actually a ritual bath, which they called mikvah. And the mikvah was done actually for very similar purposes to what the Christians then did with baptism.

[16 : 33] Firstly, it was done to signify the cleansing of a person, which the Christians then pointed to the washing away of sins as the symbol of. But second, the Jews also practiced baptism for non-Jews who wanted to become a Jew so that they could be then embraced and welcomed into the Jewish community.

So, alongside circumcision, this ritual bath signified washing and then initiation into that community. Now, all this symbolism then is carried over when then Jesus instructs his disciples to baptize in his name.

But now, the person is initiated not into the Jewish community, but into Jesus' kingdom. Baptism then expressed a belonging to Christ.

But because it's symbolic, how it's done, how the water is administered, whether it's sprinkling or immersion, then is secondary. It doesn't really matter because it's symbolism, right?

What's more important is that it's pointing to something spiritual. That a person is being welcomed into Jesus' kingdom by faith.

[17 : 49] That his sins or her sins have been washed away. And so, they now enjoy the blessings of belonging in Jesus' kingdom. But before baptism can occur, there needs to be faith.

And before faith can occur, there needs to be the preaching of the gospel. And so, if you go all the way to Matthew 4, verse 17, the disciples had to do what Jesus did.

And you'll read on the next slide. Jesus preached repentance. He said, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near. John the Baptist did the same thing before he baptized.

And so, that's part of obeying the first aspect of Jesus' instruction. In order to make disciples, yes, there's baptism. But actually, the more important thing is that the gospel is preached so that people can repent.

And then, baptism can follow. And it is the church that does the baptism because the local church is the visible sign of God's kingdom into which someone is initiated.

[18 : 55] However, it is not at baptism, but the moment of faith when our sins are forgiven and we are baptized by the Holy Spirit.

That is, for those of you who are not baptized, don't be too anxious that, Oh, what's going to happen to me before now and the time I'm baptized? No. You are already saved by faith in Jesus. It's not the water baptism that makes you born again and have eternal life and belong to Christ.

That's just a symbol. But, if you are truly a disciple of Jesus, then being baptized is the simple but important step of obedience that you go through because Jesus commanded it.

It's a powerful witness as well, demonstrating publicly what God has already done spiritually in your life. And then, of course, once we belong in Jesus' kingdom and submit to his authority, we have to then live according to that faith.

Which brings us to the second part, that the disciples have the job of teaching all disciples to obey everything that Jesus has commanded. Now, I want to pause here again, just for us to notice the order.

[20 : 09] Jesus says, baptize and then teach. It's not the other way around. Why? Because it is important that you first believe and belong to Christ before you even try to obey him.

Faith must precede obedience. We can't try and obey him and then believe afterwards. It doesn't work that way.

Because without the Holy Spirit, you have no power to actually truly obey Jesus. And in fact, you are in danger of trying to earn your salvation to enter the kingdom by your good works, by your obedience to Jesus, which is not the gospel.

No, faith in Jesus, trusting in him fully for your forgiveness, that needs to come first. And then it's only when we do that, and we know God's forgiveness, and we live under his grace, that we can then learn to obey and do everything he's commanded by the power of his Spirit.

But obedience is also then important, just as important as faith. Because if we are saved, and we say we believe in Jesus, and we confess our sins, and then we continue to live without turning away from those sins, then we make a mockery, don't we, of that faith.

[21 : 35] So, faith and obedience needs to go together. And even though our obedience may be a lifelong journey, this is what we commit to the moment we believe in Jesus. Now here the eleven disciples have a very specific role.

They're also the first ones to be taught by Jesus, given his commands directly, and that means they also have the job not just of passing on and teaching orally, but they also then wrote things down in the Gospels and the New Testaments, so that those of us who follow afterwards, all of us, each time we teach, we can actually go back to the original teaching to ensure that we are faithfully obeying Jesus.

God, in his sovereignty, has preserved Jesus' teachings for us in the Gospels and the New Testament, so that we don't have the situation of Chinese whispers, right?

One handed down to the other, and then before you know it, two or three generations down, we're not quite sure whether this was exactly what Jesus said. No, we actually have such a great privilege of the Bible to keep us coming back to the source material.

And so, with that, Jesus then gives them a final encouragement, a promise, really. He says, Surely, that is beyond any doubt, I am with you always to the very end of the age.

[23 : 02] And of course, that means he's not just with the eleven, but he's with all of us, isn't it? Because it's to the very end of the age. We have the comfort of Jesus' presence, right now, but forever, or until the end of time.

And it's not a momentary presence. Jesus is not saying, I'm with you during business hours, or on the weekends. No, but always. And so, if you go back to the start of the Gospel, one of the names that Matthew ascribes to Jesus is Emmanuel.

Emmanuel. God with us. Now, of course, if you look around, I mean, is Jesus sitting next to anyone? No.

Rather, he fulfills this promise by giving us his Spirit, right? But here's the thing. Emmanuel, God is with us in Jesus.

And then Jesus is with us by his Spirit. And lo and behold, what have you got? We've got the Trinity with us, haven't we? Father, Son, and Spirit with us by his Spirit.

[24 : 18] That means there will never be a situation where we as a church, or the church universal, or we as believers, are going to be left without God's presence, without God's wisdom, without God's power to do what Jesus has commanded.

God has actually given us all that we need to be his disciples and to make disciples. And in fact, if you look around the world and down through history, Jesus has fulfilled that very command, hasn't he?

Or promise. Disciples from all nations have been coming into his kingdom through the preaching and teaching of other disciples. Now I want to just finish by getting us to just notice the all-encompassing nature of this commission.

Because if you look at the outline, I have underlined four words in there. They're all the same word, actually. And the word is all. Jesus says, all authority is given to me in heaven and on earth to make disciples of all nations, baptizing and teaching them to obey all Jesus has commanded.

And Jesus will be with his disciples always, or all the time, until the end of the age. So friends, if you believe in Jesus and you are a disciple of Jesus, this is your calling.

[25 : 46] This is your wonderful and amazing purpose for life. Everyone gets to be involved. And everyone will be enabled to be involved. Now if this sounds daunting to you, don't be.

Because Jesus has promised you his presence and power to do so. And he's also promised you others, all of us, as a church, where we can do this together.

Not by ourselves, one individually, but together as believers and disciples of Jesus. Now that doesn't mean you don't have other responsibilities in life, that you don't still have to study or work, and things like that.

But whatever your specific circumstances, you are able to obey all Jesus that has commanded, including obeying the Great Commission, not as a separate thing, but in and through the things that God has also called you to do.

If you are a worker, then you can be a disciple, making disciples, as a worker. Yes, if you're called to ministry, then you do that as part of ministry.

[26 : 54] But if you're part of your family, then you do that as a daughter or a son, or as a parent, if you're already a parent. Making disciples is not a separate thing we do, but actually it's something we do in and through the everyday things that God has also given us responsibilities for.

But the important thing is actually not to be distracted to think that these other things are the be-all and end-all of your life, but actually whilst they are important and need to be done, we can still obey Jesus in this great commission as we do them.

And it's even possible to do them when things are not going well in your life, when they're not on track, as it were, because God can use those situations to grow you in your prayer, to grow you in your witness and your testimony, even as you exhibit Christ-likeness through those situations.

And of course, if you're here today and you're not yet a disciple, then today is a good day to begin obeying this command by, firstly, becoming a disciple and believing in Jesus. And you want to do this because the risen Lord has authority over all the earth, and that includes your life and my life.

Repent and believe in Him today. But friends, I want to just say that if you've been with us for long enough, whether it's HDD or even part of St.

[28 : 30] John's, you will see that this is hopefully what we do as a church and try to do consistently because we want to be constant in this mission.

And so, you will hear, and I will keep repeating myself, but yes, you will hear me and others like the other pastors constantly encouraging you to share the good news of Jesus, to be involved in things like the Blackburn Market, or as Steph might announce later on with the Hope 2025 campaign.

Some of you have been involved on Wednesday night coming to the Christianity Explored where we just finished and there are so many new people that have come to hear the gospel for the first time. That's something that we're really, really encouraged to do.

It gives us joy to do it over and over again because we want all people to become disciples of Jesus by any and every means.

And then we want to equip you so that you can do it wherever you might be at your places of work and study. And then, of course, we also want to focus on teaching everyone to obey what Jesus has commanded, not just today on Sundays, but through the week.

[29 : 41] As you read the Bible with each other, small groups, we want to do it with the kids and the youth, all the way to the senior members of our church. So, for example, Helen Baxter, our pastoral care coordinator, she does them when she visits them even at age care, praying with them, encouraging them with the word to help them to live where they are.

They can't even go anywhere, but in the age care itself, being disciples of Jesus and making disciples as well. So, let's be constant in this mission.

because we know that Jesus himself is leading this work. And then secondly, let's be confident and encouraged in this mission because he has promised to be with us to the very end.

Jesus is the risen Lord. His authority extends to all nations who rightly should worship him. Therefore, we are asked to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them, yes, and then teaching them to obey everything that Jesus has commanded.

Let's pray. Father, we praise your Son, Jesus, who is the ruler of heaven and earth. Please open the eyes of all in every nation so that whatever tribe or tongue they may come from, they might worship you and worship your Son.

[31 : 08] Help us to obey Jesus' commands and to press on with the work of making disciples until the task gets finished and he returns in glory. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.