

## Apprenticed to Jesus

Matthew 28:18-20

When I was four-years-old I got my first pair of glasses. We lived in Newport, Tennessee at the time. Twice a year my mom drove me to an eye doctor in Johnson City (an hour and a half drive). I have lots of memories of sitting in the waiting room, getting drops to dilate my eyes, and then the exam itself. But the main thing I remember about the actual eye examination is the eye charts. If you've ever been to the eye doctor you know what happens. The doctor projects a line of random letters on the wall. If you can read that line of letters, he scrolls down to a smaller line of letters. He wants to find out the smallest letters that you can read.

The problem for me was that I read the eye chart so many times that I eventually memorized several of the lines. I still remember "E F O T Z." And so eventually the eye chart didn't so much test my eye sight as my memory. That's the tendency with over-familiarity. If you're not careful, a chart that is supposed to test your eye sight actually only tests your memory.

In the same way we can become so familiar with certain Scriptures and certain biblical concepts that they no longer do what they are intended to do. Instead of encouraging and/or stimulating us to experience more of God, they merely become concepts that we've stored away in our memories. This doesn't have to be the case, but that's the *tendency* with over-familiarity.

One such concept that often suffers from over-familiarity is the concept of "discipleship." At the end of the gospel of Matthew, for example, we find Jesus' challenge to His disciples which we call the "Great Commission":

19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

The original disciples expended their very lives in pursuit of this mission. They travelled all across the known world in order to make disciples, baptizing in the name of the Triune God, and teaching them to obey everything Jesus had commanded. This mission captured their imaginations and stimulated them to attempt more for God than they ever dreamed possible. Almost to a person, they were martyred by those who opposed this mission (either for political or religious reasons).

And yet, if we're honest, for many of us the Great Commission is more like E F O T Z. It no longer functions as a grand, bold mission that captures our hearts and energizes us; it's just something stored away in our memory.

But I am convinced that unless being and making disciples of Jesus captures our imagination and energizes our lives we will never be the church God wants us to be. We may do a lot of good, even significant, things; but we will never become the community Jesus envisioned us to be.

Today we begin a sermon series on this topic of discipleship toward the end that being disciples and making disciples might be the passion of our lives. Today we are going to look at Matthew 28:18-20 as the foundational passage that teaches discipleship as the mission of the church.

***Jesus' Mission for the Church: Disciples Making Disciples.*** After His resurrection, Jesus met with His disciples and made the following claim:

18 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

During His time on earth, Jesus taught with authority (7:29) and exercised great authority through miracles and pronouncements of forgiveness of sin (see 9:6). He even “gave authority” to His disciples when He sent them out (10:1). That being the case, after His resurrection His disciples probably weren’t surprised when He claimed, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” – in other words in the entire created order. In light of the mission He was about to give them, believing that He had authority was vital. The same is true today. Jesus wants us to believe that He has all authority; He has more influence/clout/say than any government, organization, employer, family or friends, circumstances, unseen spiritual forces, or than any “economic realities” we might encounter. Jesus even has more authority than your “past”; He has more say in your life than the mistakes you’ve made and the sins you’ve committed. If we don’t believe that Jesus has *all* authority, we won’t take seriously the mission He gives in verses 19 and 20:

19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

The main verb in this sentence is the command “make disciples.” Three participles show three different aspects of making disciples: going, baptizing, and teaching. I will first discuss the meaning of “making disciples” and then will discuss each of the three participles in turn.

To make someone a disciple is to bring someone to the place where s/he is a devoted student of a teacher. This is more than “taking a class” from someone or reading someone’s books. In first-century Palestine, if you became someone’s disciple, your “teacher” (or rabbi) became like a father to you. You now became more loyal to your teacher than to your own parents.

Let me give you an example from the Mishnah – which was a collection of Jewish writings compiled between 70 and 200 a.d. The Mishnah explained how the Hebrew Scriptures were supposed to be applied in everyday life. Listen to one passage in the Mishnah emphasizes the type of loyalty that was appropriate if you became a disciple to a great sage/teacher:

If his father and his teacher are in captivity, [the disciple] must first ransom his teacher, and only afterwards his father — unless his father is himself a scholar and then he must first ransom his father. (Bava Metsi’a 2:11; cited at [www.jerusalem perspective.com](http://www.jerusalem perspective.com) )

That passage helps us understand something of the mindset of becoming someone’s disciple in Jesus’ day. A disciple was more loyal to his teacher than to family. When Jesus called James and John to be His disciples, Matthew records that “immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him” (4:22). They left the family business and were now more loyal to Jesus than their own father.

If you were Jesus' disciple, you had no higher priorities, no deeper commitments. Because of the privileges and the demands of following Jesus, discipleship to Him had to be a greater priority than family and friends. And so discipleship was a full-time, all-out commitment to learn from Jesus.

At this point it's appropriate to ask, "Just what is a disciple supposed to learn from his/her teacher?" Let's turn back to Matthew 10 for a glimpse into how Jesus might answer that question. Jesus is preparing His disciples for the opposition they'll face as they tell people about the kingdom of God. We read this in verses 24 and 25:

24 "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. 25 "It is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher, and the slave like his master. . .

Jesus makes the obvious statement that "the disciple. . . become[s] like his teacher." A disciple learns how to live like his teacher lives (and accepts the consequences of that lifestyle). And so back in Matthew 28:19 the command to "make disciples" was a command to bring people to the place where they become devoted students of Jesus, learning from Him how to live as He lived. The goal of making disciples is Christlikeness. If we aren't bringing people into a relationship with Jesus whereby they progressively learn to be like Him, we aren't "making disciples." We may be running excellent church programs; we may be keeping people happy; but we aren't making disciples unless people are becoming progressively becoming like Jesus.

Dallas Willard has developed this concept as well as anybody over the past twenty years. He suggests that in our day the word apprenticeship captures the idea of discipleship. If you are apprenticed to someone, you make a long-term commitment to learning from that person. For example, I recently read an article about an American teenager who moved to Japan to study under a Japanese furniture maker. As an apprentice, this young guy lived in his teacher's house, ate his food, adopted his schedule, and learned how to make furniture just like his teacher. There are dozens of ways to build furniture, but since he was apprenticed to that specific furniture maker, he learned that technique.

A disciple/apprentice of Jesus is saying, "Out of all the different ways I could live my life, I want to learn YOUR way. I want to think like You think, feel like You feel, and act like You act." It's an arrangement whereby you adopt the lifestyle of your Master exclusively.

That is the heart of the mission that Jesus gives the church: make disciples, bring people to a place where they are apprenticed to Jesus so that they now learn from Him how to live life. We don't delegate this mission to a few committed people; we play different roles, but this is our common mission.

We need to grapple with the fact that before we can *make* disciples, we have to *be* disciples. Let me make a couple points about this. First, we won't have any motivation to make disciples if we aren't experiencing the fruit of discipleship ourselves. I've noticed that people who are living a life of discipleship – who are learning from Jesus how to bless those who curse them and how to trust God for their future and that "blessed are the pure in heart" because they see God – those people are naturally involved in the process of making disciples. They are motivated to "make disciples" because they are convinced from their own lives that there is nothing better than following Christ. Nothing that this world has to offer can come close. And so they are

motivated by compassion to help others come to the same place. And people are drawn to such a life.

Second, if we aren't living as disciples of Jesus, we literally are not *able* to make disciples. We can't bring others into a relationship with Jesus that we ourselves don't have. That would be like me trying to teach somebody how to play the piano or speak Russian or make a quilt; I can't do any of those things therefore I can't bring others to the place where they can do those things. If we aren't disciples, we simply can't make disciples – either here in Manhattan or on the other side of the world.

As you think about your life, are you able to say that you are apprenticed to Jesus? Would it be accurate to say that you are actively learning from Him how you should live your life? This is very different from asking whether or not you're trying hard to obey or whether you're sincere in your faith. I'm asking whether or not you are intentionally seeking to learn from Jesus.

The presupposition behind this sermon series is that if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, you can and should be a disciple. We're at all different places in our spiritual maturity; that is not the issue when it comes to discipleship. Whether you are a brand new believer or whether you've been walking with Christ for 30 years, you should be a disciple/apprentice of Jesus. If you're not yet a believer, I am so glad you're listening to this conversation because you need to know that Jesus invites you into a life of discipleship also. This isn't the type of thing you can ever earn or ever deserve. On the basis of His death on the cross Jesus says, "Believe in Me – that My death on the cross paid for your sins – and become My disciple. I will teach you how to live. I will be your guide every step of the way." If you want more information about entering into this type of relationship, check the box on the connection card that says, "beginning a relationship with Jesus." Discipleship is for everyone who comes to Jesus, not a select few.

Let's consider briefly the three participles: going, baptizing, and teaching. Even though these are participles (participles usually have "–ing" endings in English), Greek scholars tell us that they often have the force of a command (imperative). That certainly seems to be the case here: in order to make disciples we need to go, baptize, and teach. Listen to Matthew 28:19-20 again.

19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

**"Going"** If Jesus' disciples were going to "make disciples of all the nations," they would obviously have to "go." The term translated nations is *ethne* (we get our word ethnic from this term). Jesus envisioned having apprentices among all such groupings. Practically speaking, this not only means going to other people groups in other cultures; this also means going to every grouping of people here in our culture. No group of people – no matter how far they seem from God – is excluded from our "going."

This command to make disciples of all the nations picks up a theme that stretches back to Genesis. In Genesis 12 God promised Abraham that He would "bless him" and "make him a great nation." Ultimately through Abraham's descendants "all the families of the earth shall be blessed." The plot of the rest of the Old Testament involves the threats to the descendants of Abraham. Sometimes their own disobedience was the biggest threat; other times the surrounding

nations threatened to wipe them out. But the promise remained that through Abraham all the families of the earth will be blessed.

Matthew 1:1 identifies Jesus as the “son of Abraham” – clueing us into the reality that Jesus is this descendant of Abraham through whom all the families of the earth would be blessed. Through His death and resurrection Jesus provided the once-for-all sacrifice for sin. Those who accepted that sacrifice and became His disciples would experience unparalleled blessing in the kingdom of God. Those same disciples are now included in God’s ongoing plan of blessing all the families of the earth through Jesus.

Making disciples of all the nations means participating with God in helping every grouping of people on earth experience the blessing God promised to Abraham. Some would literally go to other parts of the world (last week we heard Bob Cochran tell about going to Indonesia), but everyone would be reaching out beyond themselves. Jesus never intended His disciples to isolate themselves from the people all around them. As Jesus’ followers we should always be focused outward.

**“Baptizing”** Another aspect of making disciples is “baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” The basic pattern we see in the book of Acts is that after people came to faith in Christ, people were baptized as an expression of their newfound faith. This wasn’t merely a ritual that people did because they “were supposed to”; baptism provided a tangible way for them to express that they belonged to and were loyal to the Triune God. The term “baptize” literally means to dip or immerse. To be baptized in something was to be fully identified with it. Baptism is a way to express that disciples of Jesus were fully identified with the Triune God.

Notice that Jesus commands that His disciples be baptized in the **name** of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The concept of the “name of God” is very significant in Scripture. The name of God signifies everything that He is and everything that He does. Being baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is a comprehensive way of saying, “I’m ‘all in’ when it comes to following the Triune God. I believe everything He is and everything He says.” It’s like when a poker player takes all his chips and pushes them to the center of the table and says, “I’m all in.” When you get baptized you are saying, “My life and my destiny are now inseparable from the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”

At the end of May we had a baptism service at which 15 people were baptized. One by one people came to tell their story – how they came to the place of loyalty to Jesus Christ; and then they were baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Of course I had the best seat in the house, but I have to tell you that it was one of the highlights of my entire time here at Faith. It’s a moving experience to see people make this declaration of devotion to Jesus.

If you are a believer in Jesus Christ – if you trust that His death on the cross paid for your sin – and you have never been baptized, baptism is a critical step in your discipleship. Baptism allows you to make a public declaration of your apprenticeship to Jesus. If you are interested in being baptized (or in finding out more about baptism) check the box on the back of your connection card and we’ll get in touch with you. We’ll have a class on baptism on September 6<sup>th</sup> at 11:00 and then we’ll have a baptism service later in September.

**“Teaching”** Notice carefully what Jesus commands in Matthew 28:20:

20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

We’re not merely supposed to teach what Jesus has commanded. We are supposed to teach people **to observe/obey/keep** what Jesus has commanded. When you think about it, you aren’t really somebody’s disciple if you don’t do what they say. And so it only makes sense that if you’re apprenticed to Jesus you will actually learn to obey what the Master has commanded.

If you look back through the gospel of Matthew and ask the question, “What is it that Jesus has commanded His disciples?” you will find large blocks of teaching. The first of those is the Sermon on the Mount in chapters 5 through 7. The second week of September we are going to begin teaching through the Sermon on the Mount with a view toward actually **learning to obey** what Jesus has commanded. We’ll talk about this a lot more then, but I would simply have you consider, “What would this church be like – and what would our lives be like – if we actually learned to obey what Jesus commanded in the SoM?” What would our marriages be like, what would our parenting be like, what would our workplaces be like, and what would our relationships be like if we actually lived out the teachings of Jesus? What if we not only didn’t murder other people. . . what if we didn’t even get angry at them? What if we didn’t feel the freedom to worship until we had reconciled with those who something against us? I suspect we’d experience a type of power and a type of joy that we’ve never known.

I have to emphasize that you can’t obey everything Jesus has commanded unless you are living as His disciple. Unless you are explicitly apprenticed to Jesus, there is absolutely no way you can obey what He has commanded. Jesus doesn’t merely give us a strict moral code to follow. He teaches us to obey as we follow closely after Him. Listen to these words from Dallas Willard:

We need to emphasize that the Great Omission from the Great Commission is *not* obedience to Christ, but discipleship, apprenticeship, to him. Through discipleship, obedience will take care of itself . . . So the greatest issue facing the world today, with all its heart-breaking needs, is whether those who are identified as “Christians” will become *disciples* – students, apprentices, practitioners – *of Jesus Christ*, steadily learning from him how to live the life of the Kingdom of the heavens into every corner of human existence.

Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission*, pp. xiv-xv

We are going to spend the next three weeks exploring this core concept of discipleship: the high stakes of discipleship, the mindset of discipleship, and the barriers to discipleship. Quite honestly we are going to make a strong case for apprenticing ourselves to Jesus and saying to Him, “Whatever the cost, I will follow You.”