

## ***An Impossible Mission***

*Matthew 28:16-20*

Over the course of this morning we are baptizing eight people (2 in the 8:30, 4 in the 9:45, and 2 in the 11:00 service). In preparation for these baptisms I'd like us to think about one specific aspect of the mission Jesus gave his disciples, a mission which includes the command to baptize those who became his followers. This passage in Matthew 28:16-20 is familiar to many of you.

16 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."

Twenty years ago a movie was released that many of you saw. The Fellowship of the Rings was first movie in the Lord of the Ring trilogy based on JRR Tolkein's epic novel. The plot revolves around destroying the "ring of power" that not only gave unnatural power to the person who wore it. The good guys were in possession of this ring and met to decide what they should do with it. The host of the meeting, Elrond, announces that they needed to destroy the ring; it's power was too dangerous to try to use for good. Elrond announced that the ring can only be destroyed by taking it deep into the evil kingdom of Mordor and throwing it into the fires of Mount Doom. "And," said Elrond, "One of you [present] must do this." Boromir's now-famous comment was:

*"One does not simply walk into Mordor. Its black gates are guarded by more than just orcs. There is evil there that does not sleep and the great eye is ever watchful. Tis a barren wasteland, riddled with fire and ash and dust. The very air you breathe is a poisonous fume. Not with ten thousand men could you do this. . . It is folly."*



I think Jesus' disciples probably thought something similar when he told them their mission. They were likely thinking, "One does not simply go and make disciples of all the nations. . ." It probably seemed like folly to them. After all Israel had their God and the nations had other gods. You don't simply walk into Athens or Rome or London or Manhattan, KS and make disciples of Jesus. That type of endeavor was unprecedented. Occasionally prophets went to other nations to urge them to repent or to pronounce God's judgment, but there was never a sustained effort to go and make disciples among the nations so that they would follow the God of Israel.

How is it possible that we are gathered here as disciples of Jesus, 6,600 miles from the place where Jesus gave his mission? Jesus gives the reason in verse 18.

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 . . .

Because Jesus has been given “all authority in heaven and on earth” he commands his disciples to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.” It’s not the case that Jesus had no authority before his crucifixion and resurrection. The gospel of Matthew (like the other gospels) emphasizes that Jesus’ earthly ministry was characterized by authority: he taught with authority; he demonstrated his authority by healing people; he even had authority to forgive sins! Clearly Jesus already had authority.

What is different after his resurrection is the scope/reach of that authority. God the Father gave him “all authority in heaven and on earth.” The implication is that Jesus’ authority now has no boundaries; there is nowhere that his power is limited or ineffective. He has all authority in the heavenly realm and in the earthly realm. When the apostle Paul wrote about Jesus’ authority, he emphasized that when Jesus returned to the Father, he was enthroned at God’s right hand, “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion” (Ephesians 1:20-21) - above all the evil spiritual beings who rule and oppress all people in every nation of the world. His power/authority extends to every grouping of people on the planet.

This reality is reflected in Jesus’ favorite name for himself. The primary way he referred to himself (over 80x) was “the Son of Man.” That’s a reference to a vision in Daniel 7 where God (“the Ancient of Days”) gives the “Son of Man” dominion/authority over all the nations. Here’s the passage in Daniel 7:13-14.

13 “I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven [signals that this figure is divine] there came one like a son of man [in the likeness of a man signals that he was also human], and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. 14 And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

Jesus is the Son of Man, “fully God and fully man,” whom God has given dominion and glory and a kingdom that “all peoples, nations, and languages” should serve him.

This reality is reflected in the mission Jesus gives his disciples in Matthew 28. Because Jesus has been given all authority, this vision of people from the nation worshiping/ serving the Son of Man can now be fulfilled. What we learn in verse 19 is that Jesus exercises his authority **through his disciples** (in the power of the Holy Spirit) as we go and make disciples among every grouping of people on earth.

The only reason this mission is even remotely possible is because we now go in the power of the Son of Man who has all authority. This doesn’t mean that there is no resistance to Jesus’ authority/power. Of course not. But it does mean that the vision will be fulfilled. Jesus will reclaim the nations. People from every tribe, nation, and tongue

will one day worship him. And we have the privilege of being part of that mission. Listen again to verse 19:

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,

A disciple is someone who says from the heart, "I believe that Jesus died to pay for my sins. Since he died for me, I will live for him. He is my Lord and I am his disciple." That's what baptism symbolizes. As you'll hear in a few minutes, those being baptized will be making a series of affirmations in which they declare their faith in Jesus, renounce their old way of life and "the spiritual forces of evil in the world," and commit themselves to live as disciples of Jesus. In verse 20 we read:

20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Disciples aren't reluctant followers of Jesus; no, disciples want to be like the One who died on their behalf. Therefore, making disciples involves teaching disciples to obey everything Jesus commanded. We seek to do this through sermons, Bible studies, conversations, private/personal meditation on Scripture, prayer, etc. We seek to saturate our minds and hearts with Jesus' teachings. [Everybody's mind is saturated with somebody's voice - your own or someone else's; disciples of Jesus make sure that his voice is the primary one that fills their minds.]

At the end of verse 20 we learn that the One who has all authority is "with us" to the end of the age. We're not on our own trying to make disciples. We're not trying to use human logic and certainly not coercion. We are simply sharing the good news about Jesus and inviting people to experience what we've experienced.

God doesn't have any grandchildren. Just because your parents are Christians doesn't mean that you are. Every one of us needs to believe in Jesus to have forgiveness of sins. Then we can walk with challenging but exhilarating life of a disciple of Jesus.