



MANDATE TO BUILD • Ministry

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

Matthew 28:16-20

For many Christians, only full-time professionals – pastors, priests, etc. – do “ministry.” A small minority of the body is called into full-time service, and therefore, the rest aren’t really responsible for having a ministry in others’ lives except in general ways, such as encouragement or giving. This passage will show that the Lord Jesus Christ is commanding all Christians to make disciples – to be actively bringing people to Christ and helping other Christians grow in their faith. It is important to realize, as we study this text, that this idea of discipling others did not originate with Campus Crusade for Christ, but with the Lord Jesus Himself. Let’s begin to examine the passage more closely to observe and apply what the Lord may be saying to us as we are about to begin our careers in the business/professional world.

Matthew 28:16,17

After they have seen Jesus several times in His resurrected body, His disciples travel north to a place that Jesus designated for them. There they see Him again and bow before Him in worship. But the next statement is crucial, and so much like reality! It says that some were doubtful! Notice it doesn’t brag about how spiritual these followers were, as some texts from other religions would do. No, these followers of Jesus are portrayed as they really were – as we really are – wanting to trust Him, but also having doubts and weaknesses.

The audience that heard Jesus’ “Great Commission” that day was His disciples – but these were also men who had doubts even at this late point in Jesus’ ministry. It is encouraging for us, and important to remember, that this command was not given to “super-spiritual” people.

Matthew 28:18

Note that verse 18 does not begin with the word “but.” Why is that significant? In spite of some of the disciples doubting Him, Jesus did not hesitate to walk up to them and say to them what He wanted them to do. Verse 18 begins with a positive. Jesus is not dismayed or taken aback at their weaknesses. He approaches us in the same way. In spite of our weaknesses, He does not hesitate to step forward and command us.

Before Jesus tells them what He wants them to do, He begins with describing His right, or His position, to give them this command. He makes a phenomenally bold claim that He has all authority in the universe – on earth and in heaven. If He is being truthful, then He is King over all, and we must listen to and obey His command. If He is not telling the truth, then of course He is not God, and He didn’t rise from the dead and being a Christian is a farce. There is no middle ground here.

When various people in our society (even some Christians) say that we shouldn’t go to other cultures and “proselytize” or that it is not right to try to “convert them,” we need to look again at this passage and be reminded that Jesus is saying that He is the King of the universe. We must heed what He is commanding us to do in spite of what others may say.

What’s the Big Idea?

In this passage, Jesus commissions His disciples for what they are to do after He leaves the earth. He gives us the same commission. Jesus’ over-arching command for us to go to the world and to make disciples in all nations is especially relevant to students preparing to enter the working world.



Matthew 28:19

After establishing His prerogative to command, Jesus begins to give the actual commission to His disciples. In the original Greek language, “make” is the main verb of the sentence and it has three participles that modify it—“going,” “baptizing,” and “teaching.” Thus the main command of Jesus is to make disciples by going, baptizing, and teaching.

Notice that the word “make” is an active word. It is a word that implies action, creativeness, perhaps a process; it is a word that requires our involvement. Some Christians may think that it is solely the Lord’s job to make a disciple. It is beyond our ability. To a certain extent, they are correct. But as this verse clearly teaches—indeed commands—the Lord wants us to be actively involved in the spiritual process that is impossible for us to do in our own strength.

What does it mean to make disciples? It is the process of actively helping people become mature in Christ. This begins with new birth. We must lead others to Christ. To become spiritually mature, a person should be growing in his love for God, experiencing His forgiveness and power and obeying Him. As a result, a person will also be increasing in her love for other people, helping them grow in Christ.

It is important to note that we are not called to form small groups or lead Bible studies. Rather, we are called to make disciples – an emphasis not on what we are doing, but on who the other person is becoming.

The first word that modifies making disciples is “go.” Jesus desires for His disciples to go. They are to be proactive, not reactive. They are to advance, not to wait. Jesus wants His disciples to be people of action. Why? Because in fact that is what God is like. God is always reaching out, not waiting for us to initiate with Him, but always drawing us to Himself. And He wants us to be like Him. He wants us to be conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8: 29). He wants us to go – and this is not optional.

The scope of Jesus’ command is to go to all – including those that are Hindu, Muslim, or Buddhist. Remember, at the time that this command was given, no country on the face of the planet was “Christian.” All countries and peoples at that time were non-Christian. As they went to all the nations – the apostle Thomas went as far as southern India – they were to baptize people in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – Jesus’ declaration of the unique Christian Triune God.

Matthew 28:20

This commission concludes with two key statements. Teaching people is the third aspect of making disciples. But Jesus uses a very crucial word that makes a dramatic difference in the nature of this teaching. In order to make disciples, Jesus is not merely saying to teach to people all that He has commanded. No, Jesus is declaring that to make disciples, people must be taught to obey or observe or apply all that He has commanded! The idea of making disciples must include behavior change in the person being disciplined. It is not enough to cover lesson material. It is not enough to learn important intellectual concepts regarding the Christian faith. It is necessary that the person’s life begin to change, that she begin to adopt new priorities and that her value system change from the world to the Word. This is radical.

But there is something more here. When Jesus says that people are to be taught to obey or observe all that Jesus commanded, it means that they are also to be taught to obey this particular verse about themselves making disciples of others. So the disciples of the original eleven were to make disciples of their own who would make disciples of their own, down to us today. Thus the commission given to the eleven original disciples does not end with them. It extends all the way to us today.

Lastly, Jesus gives a great promise of assurance. As we are going to our part of all the nations, with a mandate that is impossible for us to accomplish in our own strength, He promises that He will be there. He will be with us as we trust Him for the necessary courage, skills and power to bring a colleague to Christ or to help him keep growing in his relationship with the Lord. He will be with us to encourage and give wisdom and sensitivity for the need of the moment. We can go forward because He is with us.

What’s Our Response?

As we graduate, the Ruler of the universe is calling us to make disciples of others by going, by baptizing and by teaching. Our scope is all nations, not merely our own. We must teach the people that we are developing to apply or obey all that Jesus has commanded. This can only be accomplished through active involvement in people’s lives and by depending on His promise to be with us, providing the strength, courage and sensitivity we so desperately need.

What Are the Questions?

Matthew 28:16-20

LAUNCH

As you graduate and go out into the business and professional world, what is the big picture of what Jesus would have you accomplish in ministry?

EXPLORE

Read Matthew 28:16-20.

1. Why do you suppose this passage is commonly referred to as the “Great Commission”?
2. From the passage itself, how can we be confident that this command does not just refer to those in professional Christian ministry?
3. As they received this commission from the Savior, were the disciples totally ready to take on their assignment? Why or why not?
4. After all they had seen, some of the disciples were still doubtful. Does it encourage you that Jesus still commissioned them? Why or why not?
5. How would you characterize Jesus’ claim for Himself in verse 18? Does this make you think any differently about Jesus?
6. Someone might say, “I don’t have the gift of evangelism, but I am ‘ready’ for unbelievers who ask me to explain why my life is different.” (1 Peter 3:15). Is that sufficient?
7. What would you say to a Christian who doesn’t think that it is right for missionaries to go to other countries to “proselytize them”?
8. What does it mean to “make” disciples?
9. What is our responsibility in the development of a disciple?
10. What’s the difference between organizing Bibles studies and what Jesus is commanding us to do in verses 19 and 20?
11. How would you compare the person who makes disciples to the person who “bears fruit” in Matthew 13:23?

APPLY

12. Which of the four soils described in Matthew 13 would you like to have represent your life? If you want to be the fourth type of soil, what is your plan for becoming that type of soil?
13. What is your plan to follow this command in Matthew 28:19 & 20 after graduation? What if you get too busy? What if your workplace doesn’t think too highly of this command?
14. How has the discipleship you have received prepared you for making disciples after graduation?

What Are the Answers?

1. It has been referred to as the “Great Commission” down through the years by the church because it represents the big picture of what Jesus commands His disciples to do when He leaves the earth.
2. As the eleven disciples were to go into all the nations to make more disciples, they would obviously be touching people who were not called into full-time ministry. And yet the command is to help these new disciples obey what Jesus had told the eleven – namely, to make disciples themselves. These non-full time workers, made disciples, who in turn made other disciples, and so forth.
3. Yes and no. Jesus is telling them that they are to make disciples. He would not have told them to do something that they couldn’t possibly have done. On the other hand, they weren’t ready because some still had doubts and all of them were humanly incapable of making a disciple – of changing another person’s life. We are in the same situation today.
4. Allow the group to discuss. For most, doubting disciples will be encouraging because we can relate to their weakness. If we can relate to them, then we can trust that God can use us in spite of our weaknesses, too.
5. Jesus is making the greatest claim ever made by a historical figure. If it is true, then we must bow before Him as the Ruler of the universe and obey what He is telling us to do. It’s no longer reasonable to say, “But I think that God wants me to do something else.”
6. While 1 Peter says that we should always be ready to make a defense to anyone who asks, that is not all the Lord expects of us. Jesus says that we are to “go” (verse 19) to others and actively make disciples as His witnesses (Acts 1:8).
7. We must yield to what Jesus, our Lord and King, is commanding – even when our society thinks that what He said is wrong. See Matthew 10:22; 24:9,10; and John 16:2,3.
8. The dictionary says that the word “make” means to “bring into being; to bring into a specified condition; specifically to cause to be or become.” It is an action verb. If a person is making something, he is not passively watching or hoping something will happen.
9. We are to “go,” to look for, to watch for opportunities to minister, to reach out to people that may be open to taking another step in their spiritual journey toward the Lord. We are to actively – of course, only by the power of God – make disciples. That is, to help people change to become followers of Jesus. We are not merely to “set the environment” to enable the Holy Spirit to do the work. God wants us to be actively involved in the process.

Memorize

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

Matthew 28:19-20

What Are the Answers?

10. Most Bible studies emphasize learning what the Bible says, and may also provide Christian fellowship and encouragement. Those are all good, but they are not sufficient to make disciples. In His ministry, Jesus did not only focus on what truths His disciples were to believe, but also on learning to trust Him personally and learning how to build into others. Making disciples means that we help a person to apply or obey what Jesus commanded, not merely to know what the Bible teaches.
11. The fourth soil as described in Matthew 13:3-9 and 19-23 is a parallel passage that also describes the type of person that is following Jesus' command to make disciples. Here the image is of fertile soil that provides for the grain to grow up and reproduce itself. But notice that it doesn't just add one or two more grains, but it multiplies itself into the lives of 30, 60, or 100!
12. No Christian ever says that he wants to be anything other than the fourth type of soil! Sadly, most Christians do wind up becoming another kind of soil. If we are to avoid becoming anything other than the fourth type of soil, we will need a plan and we will need an environment of encouragement from others to keep on that path for the rest of our lives. If you graduate with only a lot of good intentions, you underestimate the power of the flesh (and of Satan) to get us off course and allow the worries of the world and the deceitfulness of riches to choke the Word in our lives.
13. Allow the group to discuss. This can give the group leader insights into how to help the group members more.
14. Allow the group to discuss. If you have not been in such a discipling relationship, it will be much more difficult for you to learn how to do this with others. Some things are more easily "caught" than "taught." It's still possible, by God's grace. But if you have had this opportunity to be in such a discipling arrangement, the Lord has blessed you! Take full advantage of this great gift to you.

Notes to Self