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The Mission Has a Church
Matthew 28:11-20

Today we're going to see how Matthew ends his gospel story. The end of a story is often the most important part; it's the final word that brings meaning to the rest of the story. The way Matthew ends his gospel is a perfect example of that. This is how he chooses to wrap up the story of Jesus. This is the last thing he wants you to remember. As you think back about the whole story or read it again, this is the lens he wants you to see it through. That means that if we don't understand what this ending is about, we run the risk of completely missing the point of Matthew's Gospel. In fact, if we don't understand it and begin to live it out in our life together as a church we will miss out on the most important mission in the history of the world.
So let's humble ourselves, listen to His Word and pray that we're transformed by it.

Matthew 28:11-20
11 While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had
happened. 12 When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, 13 telling
them, "You are to say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.' 14 If this report gets to the
governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." 15 So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this
story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.

16 Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped
him; but some doubted. 18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 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, 20 and teaching
them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Prayer of Illumination

Well that's it; that's the ending. There are no appearances in the upper room; there is no walk to Emmaus; there are no lake side breakfast chats; there's not even the ascension of the Risen Christ. It simply ends with two little paragraphs about the counter-mission given by the religious leaders and the incredible, audacious mission given through Christ.

While the women, who had just held and worshipped the Risen Jesus, went off to do what Jesus told them to do, some of the guards, who had fallen over like dead men after seeing the angel of the Lord, went into the city to give their report to the chief priests. Sadly, rather than responding with belief or even curiosity, the chief priests and elders spun up a story and paid the guards off to make sure the story stuck. It wasn't even that good of a story either … it seems to me that it would be pretty hard for the guards to recognize the disciples stealing the body while they were sound asleep. The religious leaders wanted to make the resurrection story a hoax, but the only hoax is their own. Nonetheless, the counter-mission was launched.

But that's all the press it gets. It doesn't seem to concern the gospel writer that much. It's like he uses it as traveling music while the women find the disciples and give them the real news – that Jesus is alive and that he wants to meet with them in Galilee. What follows, in verses 16 – 20, is the real mission – the mission for which the church was created. So let's look more closely at what that mission is really about.

Jesus gathers the disciples and says, "*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me*". This means that all executive power belongs to Jesus. All power on earth and all power in heaven are His. Bruner says it this way, that all spiritual, metaphysical, philosophical, religious power is His. And all social, physical, political, economic power is His. There is nothing that isn't subject to the authority of Jesus; there is no other power more powerful than His. In this way Jesus sums up his whole ministry on earth – the work that He's done in his life, death and resurrection. He saying, "Guys, I am the Christ; everything I said to you was true. I am the eternal Son of God; I have authority over everything."

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations." What is the mission? What does Jesus really want them to do? What is His final command to them? **The mission is to move out and make disciples of all nations.** All nations … really? Does Jesus really want all people to follow Him? Yes; in Him is the fulfillment of the promise that God made to Abraham of using his offspring to bless the whole world. <u>All</u> authority is His, so the mission is to <u>all</u> nations – no matter what culture, no matter what social status, no matter what religion, no matter what worldview – Jesus is the way, the truth and the life for <u>all</u> the world to follow.

They can't do that if they just stay together in a nice little Jesus huddle on a mountain in Galilee. They have to move out. They have to separate; they have to go.

When they go, their mission is to 'disciple-ize'. That's my more technical translation of what it means to make disciples because in the original language it's one word – a verb – disciple-ize. This is where much of the American church has got all wrong. Dallas Willard calls it the Great Omission from the Great Commission. Notice what Jesus doesn't say – he doesn't say to make believers or to make converts or to make better people. His command is to make disciples. It's what He did with the eleven guys who stood with him there on the mountain, and many others who chose to follow Him. Jesus spent three years living with the guys he was disciple-izing, teaching them about God and how to interpret the Scriptures, showing them how to live God's way in the God's world, and demonstrating the love of God in his own life. Disciple-izing is a process of walking with people in loving relationship and showing them what it means to follow Jesus so that they begin to also live their life as a follower of Jesus – a disciple. That's what it means to make disciples.

Jesus says to do it by baptizing and teaching. In other words, helping people come to faith in Jesus and literally give possession of the lives over to God through baptism. Then teaching them – teaching them to know all of Jesus' commands, right? No, that's not right. Look at verse 20. *"Teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."* **Disciple-izing is not just about teaching people what to believe or what you know; it's about teaching people how to obey Jesus**.

The Holy Spirit does the big things like bring repentance and forgive sins and change hearts and save souls. Only He can do that, but the disciples are commanded to carry on Jesus' mission of discipleship in the world – the slow, unpredictable, life on life process of helping people give full possession of their life to God and fully obey Jesus so that they too can be about the mission of Jesus in the world.

After all that Matthew writes about Jesus, this is the application that his gospel readers are to live out. This is the mission of Jesus in the world – to go out and make disciples of all nations. There is nothing more important. It's the mission that Jesus was already living out, but now the mission has a church. And these eleven guys who make the journey up to Galilee get to be right at the heart of it. They get to be the first disciple makers and the first missionaries who set the tone for the rest of the Church. If they succeed the mission lives on, but if they fail the mission fails. It's nothing to worry about though because these guys are super-Christians. They can move mountains, they can cast out every demon, and they can heal every disease. They're not afraid of anything; they've got all the right answers; they've got years of formal education; they're committed to Jesus 110%, right? No way!

Do you remember the last place we saw the disciples in Matthew's gospel? It was the night Jesus was arrested. Matthew 26:56b "*Then all the disciples deserted him and fled*." Peter sticks around a bit longer, but after he disowned Jesus three times, we are simply told that *"he went outside and wept bitterly"* (Matthew 26:75). The disciples aren't even around for Jesus' death or his burial; they're gone. They completely abandoned Jesus is in his time of greatest need. On the day of His resurrection they're hiding out somewhere trying to save their own skin. These guys aren't super-Christians; they're **Christ deserters**. So how do you think they felt when they heard from the women that Jesus was alive, and he wanted to see them in Galilee? We don't know for sure. All we know is what it says in verse 16, "*the eleven disciples went to Galilee."*

And after what I imagine was a long, quiet and pensive journey filled with angst and uncertainty, Jesus was there ready to meet them. When they saw him – the resurrected Jesus – (v. 17) they worshipped him … but some, and maybe all of them, doubted. Even when they saw the resurrected Jesus they didn't have it all figured out! But Jesus doesn't chastise them for their doubt. He doesn't kick the doubters out. He doesn't condemn them for the way they deserted him. No, look at verse 18: "*Then Jesus came to them*." Jesus comes to these imperfect, non-super Christian disciples in the midst of their doubt and commands them to be His mission bearers in the world. Imagine that, normal everyday doubting worshippers like you and me being called to take on the mission of God for the world. Some of you believe that being a vital part of God's work in the world is reserved for a special class of Christian, but that's a lie. Every Christian is called to be part of this mission.

If they doubted when they saw Jesus, I bet they really doubted when they heard Jesus' command. You want us to go and make disciples … of all nations? Are you kidding? You want me to carry on your mission to the whole world? No way! But Jesus says, "Yes way." And here's how, "*surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* Jesus assured them with His power and His presence, not in the flesh, but through the Spirit. He will be the major source for them to succeed. He will enable them; He will give them courage: He will give them wisdom to disciple: He will give them creativity: He will make them effective. He will do all the big stuff. All they have to do is obediently move out and make disciples – to obey their God given mission.

Beloved, the most important need in the world today is for people who call themselves Christians to be about the mission of God in the world – to be about making disciples of all nations. Do you believe that? It's what the Scriptures teach. This mission from Jesus is to be the most important driving force in our lives. This is what we're called to corporately and personally. If you're a disciple of Jesus – even a fearful, doubtful, still figuring it out disciple – this is Jesus' command for you. This is His call on your life.

So, are you obeying Jesus' call? **Are you helping others become disciples of Jesus?** Are you teaching others how to obey Jesus? Do you long for your friends to know Jesus – not just the friends whose lives are a mess, but even the successful and deeply religious friends? Are you participating in God's mission to the world? How?

The first way to participate in this mission is to simply **be a disciple**. Have you given possession of your life to Jesus? Are you growing in obedience to every single one of His commands? Are you reflecting on Scripture and submitting yourself to God's Word? The wonderful grace-filled invitation of Jesus has always been an invitation to follow Him – to be a disciple, not simply to believe or be saved from Hell. The best way for us to be about making disciples is to be a disciple ourselves. But we can't get so lost in growing our own relationship with Jesus that we forget about Jesus' call to the whole world.

A couple of years ago the session voted to change our mission statement by adding the words "working together" so that it now reads '**working together to present everyone mature in Christ**.' Do you know why we changed it? We changed it because we wanted to make it overtly clear to ourselves and everyone who read it that maturity in Christ is something we work toward together not passively or privately. So take a moment to look around the room at your church – not the building, but the people. Do you care about how the people you see are growing in Christ? Do you care about their obedience to Christ? Whose responsibility is it to help them grow as disciples of Jesus? The responsibility belongs to us together.

That's why you can expect a growing emphasis around here to be about consistently meeting together with a few other folks to help each other grow in Christ – to reflect on the Scriptures together and grapple with the Lordship of Christ in your life. And that's why we've made such a big deal about Pew Power – it's really about the people in the pews owning and engaging the mission of the church. This is the kind of church that we are becoming together; we're a congregation with an ever increasing commitment to the mission of Jesus – making disciples. But we'll never get there unless you choose to follow Jesus' command.

Christ desires for you to be a vital part of His activity in the world – to be about His Kingdom business – to work together to present everyone mature in Christ. It doesn't matter if you have doubts or fears, if you're young or old, if you're an extrovert or an introvert; Jesus, through the Spirit, does all the big stuff – all authority is His. And His promise is sure – He is with us to the very end of the age. So may we be a church that goes in His power and with His presence to be who He calls us to be – disciples – and do what He's called us to do – make disciples.

Sermon Questions:

1. Read carefully Matthew 28:11-20. Underline important words or jot down some reflections you have about this passage.
2. How are the two paragraphs (verses 11-15 and 16-20) similar? How are they different?
3. Why do you think the Chief Priests still didn't believe in Jesus after hearing the report from the guards? How do we avoid that same tendency to believe only what we want to rather than the actual truth?
4. Why do you think Matthew includes (in verse 17) the detail that some (or all) doubted when they saw Jesus? What do you think that adds to this scene? What are the implications that some of them were doubters? What does it mean about our doubt?
5. What does the "Therefore" at the beginning of verse 19 implicate? What is the "Therefore" there for?
6. Is the Great Commission for every disciple of Jesus or just the eleven? How are you doing at obeying this command from Jesus?
7. What do you think Jesus is calling you to do as a result of this text and/or sermon?