

SECTION 78

JESUS COMMISSIONS HIS DISCIPLES
TO WORLD EVANGELISM

TEXT: 28:16-20

16 But the eleven disciples went into Galilee, unto the mountain where Jesus had appointed them. 17 And when they saw him, they worshipped *him*; but some doubted. 18 And Jesus came to them and spake unto them, saying. All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; 20 teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always even unto the end of the world.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. When so many appearances of Jesus occurred in the Jerusalem area, why is this appearance in Galilee so important as to deserve such special notice to the seeming exclusion of all those others?
- b. Why was it so important for Jesus to order the disciples to return to Galilee and go to a specific mountain?
- c. If Jesus had already appeared a number of times, how do you explain the fact that "when they saw Him . . . some doubted" even yet? Who do you think worshipped Him and who doubted?
- d. Do you not think that Matthew is risking the loss of credibility to insert this compromising phrase, "but some doubted"? Give just one good reason why anyone may believe Matthew, *precisely because he included it*, and for which one could doubt his integrity, had he *not* done so.
- e. Why do you think Matthew reported so few appearances of Jesus risen from the dead? Was he unaware of, or critical of, other reported appearances?
- f. Why do you think it was important for Jesus to claim universal authority before ordering His disciples to disciple all the nations?
- g. Do you see any evidence here to sustain the common assertion that "we are ordered to win the world to Christ"?
- h. As opposed to a thousand other worthy goals or responsibilities, how does the order to "make disciples" indicate the true mission of the Church?

- i. This commission is addressed to the eleven disciples present on the mountain in Galilee. Nevertheless, what evidence does Jesus give here that this commission was not limited to them, but is valid for the entire Church in all ages of its existence and is so fundamental that any congregation of the Church may judge its true success and importance to God by the degree to which it is fulfilling this order?
- j. What does baptism have to do with discipleship?
- k. What do you think Jesus intended to reveal to us by requiring baptism "in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"? What concept(s) is involved in this formulation? Some affirm that He did not intend to dictate "a baptismal formula." What do you think about this, and why?
- l. What does it mean to "teach them all things I have commanded you"?
- m. How does the solemn affirmation, that Jesus is now with us until the end of the world, express the true, fitting, final climax to the fundamental message of Matthew's Gospel?
- n. What does this assurance of Jesus' presence with us until the end of the world, intend to contribute (1) to the life of the church taken as a whole, and (2) to the encouragement of the individual Christian?
- o. What changes do you envision necessary in the life of your church to realize the full impact of Jesus' promise to be with us all?
- p. What personal steps do you see essential in your personal life to act on the promise Jesus made to be with you? Or does this promise mean little to you personally? What could you do, if you really believed it?
- q. How does Jesus' being with us until time's end reinforce His expectation that we baptize and be baptized? What connection, if any, is there between our baptism and His promised presence?
- r. If the Apostles were going to die before the end of the first century, in what real sense could Jesus be with them until the end of the Christian age? In what sense would His promise not refer to them alone?
- s. In what sense is it true that this Great Commission is actually a foregone conclusion for anyone who has been reading Matthew's Gospel carefully?
- t. Even though the Church would take up the torch also, Matthew especially mentioned the Eleven as the particular, primary early

recipients of this great commission? What impact on your soul does it make to realize that Jesus defied the whole, hell-bent world with a few humble Galileans, and won, and just keeps right on winning?

- v. Do you think the modern Church is carrying out the Great Commission? What parts are we doing? What needs reinforcement?

PARAPHRASE

Now the eleven disciples set out for Galilee.

[Perhaps here is to be placed John's report of Jesus' appearance to the seven disciples fishing on Lake Galilee (John 21:1-23).]

They went to the mountain which Jesus had designated. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him. However, some hesitated. As Jesus came up to them, He addressed them, "My Father has committed full authority in heaven and on earth to me. So, go make all nations my disciples, immersing the disciples into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to put into practice everything I have commanded you. Remember, I myself am with you every day—right down to the end of time!"

SUMMARY

Matthew chose to conclude his Gospel with the appearance of Jesus on a Galilean mountain. Jesus' appearance produced two opposite results: worship or doubt. Nevertheless, He claimed universal authority from God, and so ordered the disciples to evangelize the world, baptize the believers and teach them obedience to the whole message of Jesus. He promised participation in this task down to the last day of the world.

NOTES

Rendezvous in Galilee

28:16 But the eleven disciples went into Galilee, unto the mountain where Jesus had appointed them. The Twelve have now become *the eleven*. (Cf. Acts 1:25.) Notwithstanding the faithlessness of Judas, God's program marches on. (Cf. Rom. 3.3.)

Just when *the eleven disciples went into Galilee* is not indicated. However, it may be assumed that they observed what remained of the Feast of Unleavened Bread before returning home in *Galilee*. This would allow time for the appearance in Jerusalem (John 20:19, 26). Until this point Matthew left unrecorded the designation of *the mountain where Jesus had appointed them*. Calling it *the mountain* (*tô ôros*) does not prove it was a familiar spot, because Matthew designates other hills across the Jordan the same way (14:23; 15:29). The fact that *Jesus appointed them* (*etâxato*, "order, fix, determine, arrange") implies that the disciples really needed very express directions to go there, in the same way they required more than one reminder even to leave for Galilee (28:7, 10). It is likely that He indicated His choice during those appearances, a probability that presupposes that the appearances which Luke and John record truly occurred. In this case, we have another incidental confirmation of the Gospel narratives.

Because it was apparently Jesus' purpose not to show Himself alive to all men, "but to witnesses chosen before by God" (Acts 10:40f.), He could not set His appointment with them in some city of Galilee where hundreds of unbelievers could witness this appearance. Rather He must name some remoter location, distant from human habitation where this appearance could occur in privacy. Open fields on the plains would still be watched. Therefore, the strenuous effort to ascend a *mountain* would thin out the idly curious and furnish the desired privacy. Also, if only disciples knew the identity of *the mountain where Jesus had appointed them* and not improbably also the day and hour, then only disciples would converge on the spot.

Jesus knew that from the elevation of a *mountain* the disciples could gaze over Galilee where their first dreams of the Kingdom of God had been formed. There, in His discipleship, their fledgling efforts in His service had been expended. Now He must challenge them to world conquest. This material vantage point offers the psychological advantage of reminding them of what was known, tested and proven in their own personal evangelistic experience, and aids their perception of their own part in world evangelism in the regions beyond. (See notes on 28:7, 10.)

History's Greatest Watershed Issue

28:17 **And when they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted.** Although many of these people had already seen Jesus

alive before, this appearance produced a powerful effect. This is not common, oriental obeisance, but a new reverence for Jesus as God. To worship the risen Lord is the natural, appropriate reaction of the believer. (Cf. 28:9.) How much more so now as the disciples, filled with awe and joy, are reunited once again with their victorious Lord in Galilee, just as He promised.

That *some doubted* would appear to question the validity of the evidence given that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead. Or it could suggest that His previous appearances were finally unconvincing for some of the very eye-witnesses themselves. Despite the seeming adequacy of the proof of Jesus' victory over death given earlier, apparently competent people who were present and therefore able to give valid testimony, hesitated at the insufficiency of the so-called "evidences" that convinced other less critical (= more gullible) people. It would appear, therefore, that Matthew made an unfortunate misstep by including this damning admission on this critical, last page of his work.

One might conclude, therefore, that this phrase is to be dismissed as an ignorant blunder on Matthew's part. No sectarian apologist in his right mind, who intends to establish a conclusion regardless of the evidence, could afford to make the embarrassing admission that Matthew calmly sets down for posterity in precisely this setting where its effect would be devastating.

On the other hand, if it could be shown that we must judge our author at least normally intelligent, hence aware of, and responsible for, the long-term consequences of this phrase: *and some doubted*, then he is innocent of an inexplicable gaffe that spoils the efficacy of his argument, and with it that of his book. Conceivably, what at first glance seemed to be the most compromising remark of Matthew's entire Gospel, surprisingly supports his entire message with uncommon power. McGarvey (*Evidences*, II, 155f.) argued:

The very admission of this doubt is an indubitable mark of naturalness and truthfulness in the narrative; for it could certainly not have been thought of had it not been true; and even though true, it would have been omitted if the author had been more anxious to make the case a strong one than to tell it as it was.

Our only alternative at this point, then, is to judge Matthew so sure of the adequacy of the evidence that Jesus really arose, that no argument to the contrary based on this phrase could ever be raised. His

case is so solid that inclusion of this phrase could never even disturb it.

John confidently dared to admit that, as late as six months before the Last Week, some of the people closest to Jesus did not believe in Him (John 7:5). He boldly documented Thomas' refusal to believe (John 20:25). Mark and Luke admitted that the disciples did not believe the women's eyewitness testimony (Mark 16:11; Luke 24:11). Luke reported that the disciples, locked in a room with the risen Christ and, staring right at Him, "still disbelieved for joy and wondered" (Luke 24:41)!

Rather than doubt the evidence of the other writers, Matthew is so certain of his position, that he can afford to include even less evidence than other Gospel writers. This coincides with his style of apologetic begun with his account of the crucifixion. Just as he cited no Messianic prophecy to support the Messianic claims of Jesus, so now here, to support the truth of the resurrection, he cites only two appearances interspersed with the enemy's frantic efforts to nullify the powerful eloquence of the Empty Tomb. His technique again is "Not too little, not too much."

Granted the appropriateness of mentioning that *some doubted*, we must now ask how it was possible that people who, presumably, were already disciples, would or could continue to doubt at this critical moment, with which Matthew is going to close his book. Worse, how could they doubt, *when they saw him?* The demands of empirical evidences assume that "seeing is believing," but these see and continue to doubt!

1. Some consider it completely absurd that any of the eleven could doubt, after the convincing appearances in Jerusalem (Luke 24:33ff., John 20:19ff., 26ff.). There is hardly room for "some" who *doubted* in the small group of the Eleven. Therefore, those who *doubted*, even *when they saw him*, are held to be other people whose presence on this occasion was simply not mentioned. This event is held to be the appearance to the five hundred of which Paul speaks (Cf. I Cor. 15:6, a suggestion highly probable for these reasons:

- a. Jesus insisted that messages be sent to His followers to meet Him in Galilee (26:32; 28:7, 10). So, the reminders of this Galilean gathering were known not merely by the Eleven, but by the women who told them and potentially by many other

disciples as well. (Cf. "tell my *brothers* to go to Galilee." 28:10; Luke 24:9: "all the rest" as distinguished from the eleven.)

- b. Since the appearance was apparently the only one prearranged by Jesus' appointment, it facilitated the convocation of many more than the Eleven.
- c. Because after the ascension only 120 disciples gather in Jerusalem, it may be assumed that the larger group of 500 of whom Paul wrote, met Him earlier in Galilee.
- d. Even at Jerusalem, when the disciples are mentioned as key witnesses of His appearance, others besides the Apostles were present. (Cf. John 20:18-26; Luke 24:33.) If Jesus set the appointment during those appearances, these could know about it.

So in Galilee, it is possible that He approached and spoke to some disciples who had not yet seen Him (28:18). Even so, Matthew did not mention the 500, but centers all attention on the Eleven.

- 2. Some see this doubt as the psychological self-protection of *men who now truly wanted to believe*, but distrusted their own emotions' power to compromise their objectivity. So they continued to oppose the resurrection hypothesis until the overwhelming evidence of the facts so powerfully asserted itself that denial became not merely more unreasonable than belief, but unsustainable unless they would deny their own rationality. (Cf. Bruce, *Training*, 494f.) Such doubt expresses "mingled conflicting feelings of reverent recognition and hesitation as to the identity of the person played their part" (Bruce, *Exp. Gr. T.*, I,339). These men would take nothing for granted. Rather, motivated by a holy seriousness, they questioned whether this unusual experience might not have some other explanation. Lenski (*Matthew*, 1170) is undoubtedly right that the psychological and intellectual makeup of the apostolic group was heterogeneous: "the eleven were of different dispositions. Some were receptive, some slow to apprehend, of little faith, easily discouraged and troubled, unable to let go their old notions and to rise to the new spiritual heights." No wonder, then, that they doubted!
- 3. A fallacy lies in thinking that they saw Him *and continued to remain unconvinced during the entire discourse and even after this event*. Matthew's text does not so affirm. Rather, after the phrase in question, Matthew reports that, "Jesus came to them and spake unto them." From this McGarvey (*Evidences*, II,155) concludes that this

shows that at the moment of the doubt he was not very near to them and had not yet spoken to them. There is no difference, then, between the doubt on this occasion and on the first, when they thought for a time that he was a ghost.

- Even so, Matthew does not record their transformation into believers.
4. Another solution is to see that what they doubted was not whether Jesus were risen at all, but the identity of the One whom they now see. Awed, they had reason to doubt whether what they were seeing at first were really Jesus and not something or someone else. They could perhaps sense an alteration in His appearance: greater majesty, more evident glory. For whatever reason, some people had not recognized Him at first (John 20:14; Luke 24:16; Mark 16:12). He could appear and disappear at will, transcending physical limitations (Luke 24:31, 36; John 20:19, 26). Even though He manifested miraculous power during His earthly ministry, that surpassed the laws to which ordinary humans are subject, they could rightly wonder whether this Personage were the same humble, suffering Galilean with whom they had been so long acquainted.

Although Matthew wrote: *they doubted*, he did NOT say, "they disbelieved." The former questions; the latter affirms. Thus, it is possible to conclude that, by approaching and addressing them, Jesus gave them infallible evidence that dissipated their initial hesitation as to His identity and reality. The Apostles naturally would recognize Jesus instantly from their previous encounters with the risen Lord, and *worshipped Him*. The others, not being rushed even by the good example of others, wanted to verify their facts.

The unbelievable patience and justified confidence of Jesus led Him to address His Great Commission to those who doubted just as much as to those who believed. He knew that whatever questions remained would have answers in the grand days that followed: the Holy Spirit would come, they would experience His power in its fulness. So, He treated them even now with the same friendly courtesy, as future believers, believed the best of them, and made believers of them! What a lesson for us who demand that everyone have every doctrine straight before we treat them with courteous brotherliness!

Thus, as to the empirical reality of the fact, the hesitation of those who were slow to be persuaded is as precious as the worship of those already convinced. Their extreme prudence and refusal to be convinced except by the validity of the proof and their resultant, unshaken

certainty after their doubts were resolved by evidence, all prove conclusively that their proclamation of the risen Lord was not the result of self-deception, but because the concrete fact that Christ arose could not reasonably be disbelieved. (Cf. Luke 24:11, 22f., 36f.; John 20:8f., 24-31.) Their doubt is recorded so that we might not have a doubt (Bruce, *Training*, 479,482).

The Universal Lordship of Jesus Christ

28:18 **And Jesus came to them and spake unto them, saying, All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth.** The formal introduction of what follows is reminiscent of the formulations that introduced great discourses like the Sermon on the Mount. (Cf. Matt. 5:1f.; 10:1, 5; 13:3; 18:2f.; 23:1f.) Rather than treat the reader to an extended sermon as in the former cases, the equally satisfying summary Matthew includes is a marvel of brevity and completeness, a fitting conclusion to Jesus' life and ministry on earth, a summary of His doctrine and of His program of world conquest. Even though the content is nothing less than the solemn outline of their duty, His manner is friendly and informal, (*elâlesen autois*), "he talked with them.")

Matthew's Gospel opened with the claim that Jesus was David's Son, hence truly Messianic King (1:1). Now it concludes with His far more glorious claim of unlimited sovereignty as King of the universe. The one leads inevitably to the other. Without formally citing Daniel 7:14, Jesus, "the Son of man" par excellence, majestically claims this cosmic authority with a naturalness that is appropriate only for One whose right it unquestionably is. Without yielding once to Satan's offers of world dominion (cf. 4:8ff.), He overcame and was rewarded with His own, rightful, true sovereignty. (Cf. Acts 10:36; Rom. 10:12; 14:9; Eph. 1:20ff.; Phil. 2:9ff.; Col. 1:18; 2:10; Heb. 1:6; I Peter 3:22; Rev. 5.)

Hath been given points to the Father as the source of His authority. (Cf. 11:27; I Peter 1:21; Rev. 2:27.) As the Word of God, He was equal with God (John 1:1; 17:5; Phil. 2:5). However, during His period of self-humiliation as a servant of God, as man, Jesus qualified Himself to receive the authority and responsibilities entrusted to Him. Thus the original plan of God for man shall be realized (Ps. 2; cf. Heb. 2:5-18; see notes on Matt. 21:16).

The Kingdom of God shall be given those uncompromising saints who, like their Lord, really defeat Satan's offers of "all the kingdoms

of this world" (Dan. 7). We can only do this in the measure we really acknowledge the transforming power and cosmic sovereignty of the risen Christ over our lives and problems. Little will be done to make believers, until disciples believe in that awesome authority and power whereby He is able to subject everything to His control. As long as our Omnipotent Christ is in control, we can never think our task impossible.

The Universal Mission of the Church

28:19 **Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Therefore,** i.e. on the basis of the unlimited power and awe-inspiring, universal authority of Jesus' Lordship, we may do anything He tells us because of His might to strengthen, defend and lead us in triumph (Phil. 4:13). Despite the staggering odds against us and although our lives and ministry be severely limited by the greatest obstacles and gravest dangers or even cut short by martyrdom, we may be confident that He shall make His gigantic undertaking to triumph and we shall reign with Him anyway. A universe under His boundless control cannot be out of order—no matter what happens.

Go ye: the Church must involve herself in aggressive warfare that ignores earth's national or cultural boundaries or else be fundamentally disobedient to a Lord who aims at ultimate, total control of the earth. Earlier, Israel's light in the world was less aggressive. God's people received men if they approached Israel. Now, however, this positive going to them to take Christ's message is a new element.

Merely because expressed as a participle, *Go ye (poreuthentes)* is no less a command. Since it is subordinate to a principal verb in the imperative mood (*mathêteusate*), this renders it no less a command than that verb itself. (Cf. e.g. 28:7, [= 10]; Luke 19:5 in Greek.) Had Jesus desired to say, "as you go, preach," He could have expressed Himself differently, (*poreuomenoi kêrussete*, 10:7). The ASV is correct in rendering this participle and its main verb, *Go ye, and make disciples*. Often those who argue that the Greek means, "Having gone," as if it were not imperative, are not consistent in using the same logic or grammar with the other two participles in this commission: *baptizing (baptizontes)* and *teaching (didaskontes)*. Although these actions are admitted on all hands to be absolutely essential, the *going* is no less imperative than either of these. So, the

main point of this commission is to bring the message of life in Christ Jesus to all, not to wait to do so if and when we happen to go.

The early Christians did not automatically or naturally grasp the universality of the Gospel (Acts 10:18; 11:19). Because of their nationalistic prejudices, they took their time about evangelizing a different ethnic group or establishing the first racially integrated congregation (Acts 8-11). So, His command, *Go ye*, is not simply appropriate but imperative. Further, that this order was not limited exclusively to the Apostles is clear:

1. The early Christians understood it as applicable to the whole Church. (Cf. Acts 8:2, 4; 11:20.) This understanding may arise from the fact that many non-Apostles were present when Jesus gave this great mission. (Cf. Mark 16:13ff.; Luke 24:13, 33ff., 44-49 with John 20:19-21.) Since Jesus did not apply it exclusively to the Apostles, they could consider themselves responsible to carry out this commission within the limits of their gifts and opportunities.
2. It is implied in "teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." What Jesus commanded the Apostles they loyally committed "to faithful men who would be able to teach others also." (Cf. II Tim. 2:2.) The Apostles told the Church what Jesus had told them: *Go ye and make disciples of all the nations*. And so the irrepressibly joyful song is taken up by new voices in new languages.
3. The Lord's vineyard and harvestfields are still plentiful (9:37f.) The field is still the world (13:38). All church members are non-professional missionaries who live in an area of the world that needs the gospel as truly as someone a thousand miles distant. The efforts of missionaries in other areas do not exclude, but rather require, those of Christians in the areas whence the former were sent forth.

For the final time, Matthew briefly highlights one of the sublimest themes of his book, expressed in the grand words of Jesus. Anyone who has been reading this Gospel closely could well suspect that, sooner or later, He whom Matthew presented as the truly Jewish Messiah interested in the salvation and blessing of Gentiles; not merely of Hebrews, would arrive at this point. (24:14; 26:13; cf. Special Study: "Gentiles" at close of this volume.) Consequently, the Great Commission is no new revelation but the well-prepared, foregone conclusion of everything Matthew has included to describe the purpose and direction of Jesus' life and ministry on earth.

Even so, this is neither the first time nor the last that Jesus would direct His followers to evangelize the earth (John 20:21ff.; Luke 24:48ff.; Mark 16:15ff.; Acts 1:4-8). It is highly significant that the Evangelists note on how many different occasions the risen Lord revealed His deepest concern by concentrating so much of His post-resurrection instruction on the disciples' aggressive campaign of witness before the world (Acts 1:1-9).

This King of the universe orders His subjects, not to conquer *all the nations*, but to *make disciples* of them. The goal of the Gospel is not to develop great philosophers, pious religionists, holy mystics or theological lawyers, but *disciples* who learn from Jesus, let Him teach them and submit to His Lordship. Because *disciples* are to be the product of the Church's efforts, Matthew has deliberately chosen to utilize this word, *disciples*, rather than "apostles" throughout his Gospel, to furnish the paradigms whereby the reader may grasp what discipleship implies. Even though the Twelve disciples became Apostles, no one must misunderstand that these great men whom we have come to respect highly for their work's sake were once common *disciples* with problems, ignorance, prejudices, conceit, frustrations and sins. But they were in love with Jesus, submitted to His leadership, committed to His Kingdom. Although they sometimes failed to understand Him, their unshakable commitment to Him and willingness to learn from Him brought them unerringly back on course. All of them risked flunking out of His school, but all of them but one let Him be the Teacher! This alone made the difference between the Pharisees and genuine students of Jesus, between sectarians and Christians, between camp followers and real learners, between the multitudes and these who fought back their fears, crying, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and come to know, that you are the Holy One of God" (John 6:68)! We are to make people believe that Jesus has all the truth and long with all their hearts to submit to the truth and remain in it (John 14:6; 8:31).

There are no exceptions: His gospel is directed not just to Israel, but to *all the nations*. Israel's exclusive privilege has ended (21:43). They are now but one of *the nations*. Consequently, Jesus' early restriction of the Apostles' ministry (10:5) is now completely countermanded. From this time on the Christians preached to every creature, "to the Jew first and also to the Greek," (Acts 13:46; Rom. 1:16; 2:9f.). But the Jews are to be admitted to the Kingdom, not because

of physical sonship to Abraham or by adherence to their cultural heritage, but by sincere discipleship to Jesus and salvation by faith in His grace (Acts 15; Gal. 2:11-21).

All the nations means Jesus demolished such divisive boundaries as culture, class, race, sex or wealth which formerly structured mankind (Gal. 3:28). There can be no untouchables or unlovables unworthy of an equal place in His Kingdom. Now the decisive question is: Is my neighbor a *disciple*? If not, he is a prospect for the Gospel. If so, he is mine to love as a "brother in Christ, a subject of the heavenly King, a member of a new race being formed from every kindred and tribe" (Tolbert, *Good News From Matthew*, 247). This is the spirit of God's intention for Abraham's grand family, that "in you and in your children shall *all the nations* of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 22:18). The Church's mission, therefore, is relevantly rooted in God's faithfulness in keeping His promise to Abraham!

The Formal, Definitive Induction into the Kingdom

Baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Jesus' command to "make disciples" requires that the only appropriate candidates among *the nations* for baptism be *disciples* of Jesus. They are not undisciplined peoples who have never enrolled in the school of Christ to learn from Him (11:28f.). Nor are they babes who cannot acknowledge His Lordship by believing (Mark 16:16; Acts 16:31) or by repentance (Acts 2:38). To suppose that infants can be inducted into the Kingdom by baptism has historically introduced into the Kingdom generations of people who were never *made disciples*. Similarly, formally correct baptism of unconverted adults continues to swell churches with pagans uncommitted to the Lordship of Jesus. The early Christians rightly thought that "making disciples" was the way people must be saved, and equivalent to conversion, the new birth, becoming Christians (Acts 14:21f.).

That literal immersion in water is the rite intended must be concluded from the consideration that His disciples were thoroughly familiar with John's literal baptizing in water (3:1ff.; John 3:22f.) and practiced it themselves (John 4:1ff.). When they heard Him order them to baptize, they would be immediately reminded of that immersion in water with which they were already accustomed, especially since He did not qualify His words otherwise. That they thus

understood His meaning, the uniform practice of the apostolic Church is convincing confirmation. (Cf. Acts 8:36-39.) That a baptism in the Spirit is not meant is proven by the consideration that when Jesus summarized the glorious mission His Church must undertake, it is most unlikely that He would insert a command expressed in language *symbolic* of something else when all else He said is to be understood *literally*. His command implies that His disciples administer the baptism in question, whereas Jesus Himself would be the administrator of baptism in the Holy Spirit (3:11; John 1:33; Acts 2:33).

Does Jesus hereby make *baptizing* essential to salvation (Titus 3:5; I Peter 3:21)? No more nor less than the belief and repentance that precede it (Acts 2:38). No more nor less than the discipleship requisite to it. No more nor less than His own death with which baptism identifies the penitent believer (Rom. 6: Col. 2:12). And no more nor less than the growth to maturity Jesus requires after baptism (20:20). But by ordering baptism, Jesus tests every man's discipleship as concretely as if He had ordered him to sacrifice his firstborn son or to build an ark or paint lamb's blood on the doorposts of his house. Even so, Staton (*The Servant's Call*, 50f.) warned that "to emphasize baptism to the neglect of 'making disciples' is to disobey the Great Commission. We are to baptize only repentant believers." If a person is quite content to run his own life, he has not acknowledged the Lordship of Jesus. He does not accept the meaning of belief and repentance.

For the Jewish reader, quite noticeable in this command required of *all nations* is the complete silence about circumcision or anything else belonging peculiarly to Judaism. This point was lost on too many Christians during the first two decades of the Church's life (Acts 15. Jerusalem council around 50 A.D.).

Into the name: "God is one and His Name one" (Zech. 14:9). He is not merely the God of Jews only but also of Gentiles (Rom. 3:29f.; 10:12). Immersion *into the name* is more than a formulary repetition of the divine Name over the candidates for entrance into the Kingdom. It is more than our acting as agents on His authority, "in the Name of the Almighty." Rather, *baptizing them into the name* objectively initiates them into a new relationship with the one God whose Name it is, a relationship of Owner and owned. Baptism becomes the moment when the believer is invested with the Name of his new Master to whom and into whose service he is now formally dedicated. If God

promised to meet with His people where His Name is named (cf. Exod. 20:24; Matt. 18:20), then it is no marvel that the Divine Name should be placed on every single believer (Rev. 3:12; 14:1; 22:4) and on the body of believers thus constituted to grow up into a holy temple in the Lord (I Cor. 3:16f.; 6:19f.; Eph. 2:20ff.; I Peter 2:5; Rev. 21:3).

Without officially naming the Trinity, Jesus implied the doctrine by placing each of the three Persons in a unified relationship into which the believer is baptized. Omitting all other beings, angels or men, He unites just these three. (Cf. other examples of this phenomenon: I Cor. 12:4-6; II Cor. 13:14; Eph. 1:3, 10, 13; 2:18-22; 3:14-17; 4:4-6; 5:19f.; II Thess. 2:13f.; Heb. 6:4-6; I Peter 1:2; I John 3:23f.; 4:2; Jude 20f.; Rev. 1:4f.) In so doing, He implied the essential deity and equality of each Person mentioned, hence also the high significance of the new relationship the believer sustains to each one. Expressions such as "baptized in the name of Jesus Christ" or "baptized into Christ" (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5; Gal. 3:27) do not deny the Trinitarian formula, because Luke and Paul may not have intended to express the exact form of the baptismal formula used on those occasions. Rather, they affirm the believer's confession that, of all earth's spiritual leaders, only Jesus has Messianic authority to admit us into living fellowship with the Triune God (11:27; John 14:6).

The Daily, Unfinished Task of the Church

28:20 teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. If the former commands express the evangelistic efforts of the Church whereby people are brought into the Kingdom, this latter expresses the edification of the saints whereby they are kept there. The believers, as disciples, must receive further instruction, not merely to recognize orthodox doctrine or adhere to a few formalities, but *to practice everything I commanded you*. (Cf. I Tim. 1:5; James 1:22f.; 2:8-26.) With the Lord, there can be no genuine Christianity that stops at mere mental mastery of material and does not also lead to lives transformed into the image of Christ, making us partakers of the divine nature (Eph. 4:11-15; II Peter 1:3-11). The test of discipleship is how much of Christ's word bears fruit in us (John 15:1-17), which is evidenced by our obedience (John 15:10, 14). Our rule of faith and practice must be:

1. *everything*; i.e., nothing omitted by convenience or neglect. (Cf. Acts 20:20, 27)
2. *I commanded*, clearly revealed truth, not human opinions or inferences (II Peter 3:2; I Cor. 14:37).
3. *you*, my witnesses, empowered by the Holy Spirit (John 15:26, 27; Acts 1:8; 10:41, 42); i.e. the Apostles' doctrine (Acts 2:42; II Tim. 2:2; I Cor. 15:1ff.), not false revelations purporting to be inspired (II Thess. 2:2). Lest the Apostles forget something, He furnished them the divine Spirit to teach them all things and remind them of everything He had said to them (John 14:26).

What does it mean to *teach them everything I commanded you*?

1. His own centrality in all of God's revelations in the Hebrew Scriptures, His own universal authority expressed here.
2. His specific lessons that inform our minds.
 - a. Self-denial, cross-bearing.
 - b. The Kingdom, its goals, methods, values, future.
 - c. The disciple's relationship to others, humility, forgiving spirit, helpfulness.
 - d. The dangers of hypocrisy, pride, ambition, self-deception.
 - e. His emphases on the spiritual, as opposed to the material and political nature of His rule and Kingdom.
3. His great, precious promises to motivate us to become sharers in His divine nature.
4. His own marvelous example that shows us what righteousness means and how it is achieved. His entire life and ministry, death and resurrection are full of information about the mind of God and how human conduct can reflect it.
5. His commands that render specific His moral imperatives, His graciousness to make clear what it is He expects us to do.
6. His unequivocal confidence in the authority and validity of the Old Testament as well as the Christian's new relationship to its standards, examples, types, predictions, theological concepts, etc.
7. His validation of the authority of the Apostles and their ministry.
8. His driving sense of world mission to seek and save that which is lost.

This is but a poor, short summary. The mind of Christ is broader than this. But if we *observe all* that He commanded, we shall not simply have more of the Spirit of Christ, but more appropriately and significantly, the Lord shall have more of us! The clearest lesson

here is that selection of a few pet doctrines cannot substitute for loving absorption of the total mind, ministry, manners and morals of Christ.

God with Us Forever

And lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. This heart-thrilling assurance aims to encourage His people to believe that they have power equal to their task in the age-long mission on which He sends them and that He personally and concretely guarantees this power with His presence. (Cf. Exod. 33:14f.; Josh. 1:5.) This heartening word to weak mortals burdened with the responsibility of discipling a lost world is but another way of saying, "I send you heavenly power, the Holy Spirit my Father promised," (Luke 24:49). Since these disciples had already labored in Galilee in Christ's absence (Matt. 10:1ff.; Cf. Luke 9:6, 10; 10:17ff.), they knew that the power He delivered to them was invincible. The visible presence of Christ was not to be expected because not absolutely essential to the victorious completion of their mission.

Matthew omits all mention of the ascension. Three considerations argue that his silence cannot be interpreted as a denial of Luke's clear affirmations that it occurred:

1. Even before promising them His presence with them, His command to go had already implied His absence during their efforts, unless somehow He could accompany each one personally. *His incarnation had limited Him to be one Man in one place.*
2. Unless He were to overcome the previous, self-imposed, spatial limits on His physical, even if glorious, body, how could He personally remain with *all the believers in all the world until the judgment?* But by dispensing with these limitations, He could be everywhere with all His people all the time. Although the ascension means so much more, it is nonetheless a highly feasible, appropriate way to facilitate this.
3. Matthew's special purpose was to picture Jesus as the Christ, ruling the Kingdom of God among His people. While His return to heaven could still accomplish this, Matthew desired that the last impression of the reader should be that of the heavenly Messianic King, Jesus Christ ruling on earth, living among His people. Matthew has created a magnificent effect by not reporting the ascension. The reader is left with the impression that life in the

Kingdom of God continues as if the Lord never departed. Rather, in the person of the Holy Spirit, Jesus would somehow take on omnipresence, so that each disciple, however far across the face of the earth he may go, might know Jesus' love and sympathy and bank on His vast reserves of heavenly might. Thus, any disciple may maintain the closest contact with His heavenly King.

So, even if it would be His eternal Spirit to accomplish this uninterrupted omnipresence, Matthew's report of His promise, by its nature, presupposes His absence and leaves room for the ascension, reported by his colleagues.

The grand significance of His Name, "Emmanuel" (1:23), with which Matthew's Gospel began and now ends, shall be realized: God is with us in the person and presence of the Spirit of Christ. Now it becomes clear how His presence could bless even the smallest possible gathering of the Church anywhere in the world in any age (18:20). Already the language of this cosmic Sovereign reflects the confidence of the eternal point of view where all tomorrows resolve into one endless now: *I am*. (Cf. John 8:58.)

Always, even unto the end of the world: the time-barrier has been broken. Jesus is Lord of the Christians, singularly and collectively, in every epoch until He pleases to call a halt to this age and start eternity rolling for us. Thus, the modern Christian, rather than lament his misfortune not to live in that great golden age when Jesus walked the dusty roads of Palestine, may rise to the challenge of the early Church who saw her risen Lord ascend into heaven, leaving them the power of His Spirit, rather than His physical presence. The early Christians adored Him, not as an admirable historical figure, but as their Eternal Contemporary who led them always, everywhere in triumph (II Cor. 2:14ff.).

Although the Apostles would not live *unto the end of the world*, because they would die before that moment arrived, yet His being with them promised them support, not only in their personal ministry but, especially by means of the Holy Spirit. He would give power and authority to their words, so that their words, whether oral or written, would become the touchstone by which all of the Church's future life would be judged. (See notes on 10:40; 19:28.)

Even though He gladdens our hearts by the warmth of His presence, the time-span between His departure and His return appears to lengthen as He guarantees His presence down to the end of an era that must seem unthinkable long for those whose Messianic expectations looked

for a rapid conclusion of the age. (Cf. John 21:22f.) Contrary to the misunderstandings of those who read this notion into Scripture, the concept of a distant Parousia was already taught (24:48; 25:5, 19; Luke 19:11).

After this, the disciples would return to Jerusalem for the Ascension in anticipation of the arrival of the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:48-52; Acts 1:4—2:4). Matthew closes his Gospel before these latter events, not to diminish their importance or, worse, because he supposedly knew nothing about them, but to leave in the readers' mind the ringing challenge of world-wide evangelism in the Name and power of the Risen Lord, Jesus the Messiah. As he has done in so many episodes before. Matthew now terminates his entire book without relating what the people did when they first heard Jesus' divine mandate. The conscience of the reader is left to ponder, "Were I in this situation what must I do about Jesus?" Matthew's brilliant conclusion implies: Jesus has completed His mission expressed through His incarnation. Now He grants us the fellowship of His omnipresent Spirit, in order that we might successfully and joyfully fulfil ours.

For further study, see Wilson, *Learning From Jesus*, 531-541.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. In relation to the appearances in Jerusalem, when did the appearance in Galilee recorded by Matthew occur?
2. To whom did Jesus appear on this occasion?
3. Explain why some of these could worship Him.
4. Explain why others doubted.
5. How many appearances of Jesus does Matthew report?
6. What may we learn about Jesus from His self-revelation in this section?
7. Quote the pre-amble to the Great Commission.
8. Explain why this introduction to the Great Commission was necessary.
9. List every evidence in the Gospel of Matthew that conclusively established that Jesus really possessed all authority.
10. What does it mean to baptize "into the name of" someone?
11. In what sense would Jesus say, "I am with you"?
12. How could His presence with His people last "until the end of the world"?