

THE CALL TO DISCIPLE-MAKING

Two Assurances: Authority and Presence
Matthew 28:16-20
September 16, 2018

Summary: When Jesus met with the Eleven on a mountain in Galilee, not only was his glory revealed but also their frailty. They were only Eleven at that point; they were down a man because Judas had fallen away. And even those who remained were not utterly convinced. Some worshiped, but some doubted.

In other words, those disciples were just like us. Some of us truly and deeply worship Christ, and therefore are ready to receive any call and commission. But others have doubts, hesitations, fears—we would prefer to negotiate our discipleship rather than take up our crosses and follow Christ. And because of that, we would like to think that the Great Commission is just for aggressive, fully committed disciples. Not us. Yet Jesus gave the commission to all eleven, and soon every single one of them became a joyful, sacrificial disciple-maker. What changed them?

Our assertion is that it wasn't the force of the command but the force of the commander. They became convinced that Jesus had all authority and that he was with them at all times. Therefore they could go and make disciples.

When Jesus says, "All authority has been given to me, therefore you go," he is not powering up on us, he is powering us up. He is backing us, authorizing us, and reassuring us that the King of kings stands behind us. Like when Moses lifts his staff and God parts the Red Sea. Like when Christians pray in Jesus' name and God responds like it's Jesus who is praying. Like when we share the gospel and God opens hearts and transforms eternal destinies. All authority stands behind us. Simba opens his mouth and Mufasa roars.

In Ephesians 1:22 we read, "God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything *for the church*." Jesus exercises his authority on our behalf and for our benefit, that we might be hopeful, joyful, and confident. Backed by the King, we have nothing to fear.

But not only is our mission overarched by Jesus' omnipotent, transcendent authority, it is also undergirded by his intimate, imminent presence. "Surely I am with always, to the very end of the age." Nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:35-39). In fact, when our circumstances make it seem that we are most alone, Christ is most present. In persecution we experience the fellowship of Christ's sufferings (Phil. 3:10); when we're insulted for Christ's sake, the Spirit of glory and of God rests on us (1 Peter 4:14).

Our Year of Disciple-Making is, in the end, about coming to grips with these great realities, that the authority and power of Christ equip us for his joyful, fruitful mission—and each of us has a part to play in it. The great commission comes to all of us, the total worshipers and the fearful doubters; and together, by faith and practice, we can make it more natural to do our part.

Discussion Guide:

1. Read Matthew 28:16-20.
2. Why do you think that when Jesus appeared to his disciples some of them doubted? Where do doubts, fears, or hesitations creep into (or dominate) your life as a disciple?
3. Two quotations were shared near the beginning of the sermon. Discuss them:

“It is my contention that in the encounter with people of other religious persuasions or no religious persuasion, Christians should confess openly their missionary identity. It belongs to the center of our faith, to our understanding of God. It is basic to our Christology and to our anthropology.”

— *Emilio Castro, pastor and global mission leader*

- What does it mean to have a missionary identity?
- Do you agree that we should openly confess it? Why?
- How should we bring our faith into more open discussion with people who are far from God?

“Three things ought to be natural that today, at least in Western Christianity, are anything but natural—namely, worship, evangelism, and suffering.”

— *J.I. Packer, theologian*

- What is the relationship between worship, evangelism, and suffering?
- Why do you think these are not natural to our Western Christianity?
- How can we make them more natural?

4. Process Christ’s authority and apply it to your life.

- When we read, “God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything **for the church**” (Eph. 1:22), what does that mean to you? How does that empower you?
- When Revelation 5:9-10 and 1 Peter 2:9 assert that we are kings and priests, what does that mean? What is the relationship and interplay between Christ’s authority and ours?

5. Process Christ’s presence and apply it to your life.

- Acts 1:8 promises us power, through the Holy Spirit, to be Christ’s witnesses. Likewise, the Great Commission reassures us of Christ’s permanent presence. Moreover, Romans 8:35-39 asserts that we are more than conquerors through Christ, and that nothing can separate us from his love. What “street value” does this have for you? What difference does it make—or should it make—in your life?

6. Abraham Kuyper, a Dutch theologian, famously said, “There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, Mine!” But someone wryly commented that we live as if he said, “There is not one square inch of my private devotions or churchgoing that doesn’t belong to Christ. *The rest is mine.*”

- So what is one way in which Jesus wants more of you for his disciple-making mission?
- Is there any other area of your life in which both you and Jesus are saying “Mine!”? What do you think you should do about that?