

## **“Commission Motivation”– Matthew 28:16-20**

Brandon Holiski  
Southern Oaks Baptist Church  
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*[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, [www.welovethegospel.com](http://www.welovethegospel.com).]*

Take your Bible and meet me in Matthew 28.

This will be the final sermon in a series designed to help us see the biblical basis for our vision as a church and the plan (on a principle level) we are pursuing to fulfill it. We certainly will not have said everything that can be said on these matters (even after today), but my prayer has been that what has been said will be used by God in our lives and in this church.<sup>1</sup>

Why do we exist?

**We exist to glorify God through Gospel-transformed lives.**

How will we seek this?

*We do this by actively embracing **Gospel-Centrality**, the **Great Commission**, and the **Great Commandments** as we follow the Son of God, rely on the Spirit of God, and submit to the Word of God.*

Perhaps now the sermon series graphic will make more sense. Notice at the center there is that symbol, four arrows pointing toward the center and forming a cross. Then around that there is a diamond that creates four additional arrows that go out in every direction from the cross. That's meant to be a symbol of Gospel-Centrality, which has the cross at its center and, therefore, Jesus as its center. The way we read Scripture is Gospel-centered because everything in the Bible is helping us see our need for Jesus or Jesus Himself or the implications of the work of Jesus on our behalf. It all flows to or from Him and His cross.

Our lives are no different. We had a motto at the last church I pastored. We would say, we go “from the world to the cross and from the cross to the world.” God redeems us from the world and its ways and then sends us out in the world to proclaim the hope of that redemption. Thus our lives are Gospel-centered too.

Then, you'll notice, on both sides of that symbol of Gospel-Centrality, a depiction of the other two “GCs” we have been considering. On the right we see visual representation of Jesus and, while you can't see it from this distance, the words from Matthew 22, where Jesus articulate the Greatest Commandments—Loving God and loving others. There are arrows that go to and from those Great Commandments in the graphic because, as we have seen, when the Gospel's power works in our lives it will change our lives and that will be expressed in our love for God and neighbor. And as we seek to love God and neighbor, we will need to go again and again to the Gospel to find the resources to do that the way God desires. So the Gospel pushes us to the Great Commandments and the Great Commandments push us to the Gospel.

On the left side, you see a globe and some of the words of the Great Commission. Again, there are arrows going to and from that image for the same reasons. In the Great Commission we are sent out to make disciples (that's the command remember), but we can't do that without proclaiming the Gospel. So we are to make disciples by going to the nations with the Gospel, baptizing those who respond in repentance and faith the Gospel along has the power to produce, and teaching them all that Jesus has taught (which has absolutely everything to do with the Gospel too, as we have seen). So our understanding of the Gospel will

flow naturally into the need for the Great Commission and our actively embracing the Great Commission will require us to keep the Gospel ever before us. So understood properly, I would argue, these three GCs are inseparable.

Now today we are wrapping up the series. We are still discussing the Great Commission. We have already examined what it calls us to actually engage in (i.e., disciple-making) and how it calls us to engage in it (i.e., going, baptizing, and teaching). Today we are going to peer into some motivation issues. But before we do, let's do the most important thing and listen closely to the Word of the Lord.

Take a look at the setting and content of the Great Commission. Beginning in verse 16, we read,

*“Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. <sup>17</sup> And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. <sup>18</sup> And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> 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, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’”* (Matthew 28:16-20)

Now let's shift gears a bit. We want to be a church that actively embraces the Great Commission not just with our dollars, but also with our going, our baptizing, and our teaching ministries. We have looked at each of these dimensions of disciple-making. What I want us to notice now are three motivating factors in this text that can propel us toward Great Commission faithfulness. Three motivating factors. Here is the first one. We make disciples because, first...

### **The Authority of Christ Inspires Submission**

Notice that Jesus leads not with a command, but with a claim. The first words out of His mouth are *“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me”* (Matthew 28:18). That's a claim concerning the reach of His authority.<sup>2</sup> It is all encompassing. It's without border. It extends to every nook and cranny of God's creation, whether in heaven or on earth. It's divine.

That is an incredible claim, but it should be noted that it's also an anticipated claim. Jesus' favorite way to refer to Himself was as the “son of man,” a messianic title drawn from the Old Testament book called Daniel. In that book, the prophet Daniel had a vision depicting the authority that would be given to the “son of man,” which he describes in this way:

*“I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. <sup>14</sup> 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.”* (Daniel 7:13-14)

Daniel was seeing the exaltation of the resurrected Christ. God the Father has bestowed on Him complete and total authority over all creation. That's really important for us to see because it serves as the basis for the command to make disciples in the Great Commission. The logic couldn't be clearer. Jesus has authority over everything and therefore over the purpose and trajectory of your life as well, *“therefore”*, the text says, *“make disciples of all nations”* (Matthew 28:19). Out of that authority, He wills this for your life. All of us.

It's common in our day to hear people describe their conversion experience in terms like this: “And it was at that moment that I *decided* to make Jesus my personal Lord and Savior.” There is certainly truth behind that statement. But the statement can be misunderstood. You don't get to decide to make Jesus Lord. Jesus

is Lord, regardless of what you decide about of Him. Your inability to recognize His Lordship doesn't change who He is. If the whole world denied His existence, He would still be seated and exalted at the right hand of the Father. In no uncertain terms, the Apostle Paul describes our crucified Savior like this:

*“God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,<sup>10</sup> so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,<sup>11</sup> and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”* (Philippians 2:9-11)

The authority of Christ demands that response. The question is not *if* you will bow the knee and confess His Lordship, but *when*. Will we do it now as recipients of His grace and favor or when it is too late as objects of His wrath? Those are the only two options available.

If you're a Christian, then you have acknowledged His Lordship now. You have confessed Him as Lord. But have we forgotten the point of His Lordship? The point is His Lordship is that He has authority over your life. Does the way you live your life demonstrate a submission to that authority? Does our conduct match our confession? It does to the extent that we are obedient to His commands. That confession of “Jesus is Lord” in those baptismal waters is an empty confession unless it has implications for our lives. And in light of this context, those implications relate to His calling on our lives, namely to be engaged in making disciples of all nations. Our going, baptizing, and teaching demonstrate that our confession of Christ's Lordship is no empty confession. It conveys reality. His authority has changed our lives. It has set the trajectory of our lives. It has inspired in us submission. Our aspiration in life should be for people to find no other explanation for how we live and invest our lives than the fact that Jesus is our Lord.

So that's the first motivating factor behind our living out the Great Commission. We make disciples because Christ has all authority and His command is not lost on us. We joyfully submit to the call because Christ is Lord. He has given all for us, so we give our all for Him. And we have to assess whether our lives demonstrate His authority? How could they, if we are not making disciples? How could they?

But notice, second, that His authority is not the only motivating factor behind the Great Commission. We also make disciples because...

### **The Presence of Christ Inspires Confidence**

Notice that the Great Commission ends (along with the book of Matthew) with Jesus offering the assurance of His presence—“*behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age*” (Matthew 28:20). Isn't that comforting? What an encouragement to know that the sovereign Lord is in our court. That's the last thought of the book and it's a theme that Matthew has put before his readers from beginning to end. In the very first chapter, in fact, Jesus was introduced as the one who would be called “*Immanuel,*” which means “*God with us.*” He was with us to “*save his people from their sins*” (1:21-23).<sup>3</sup> So this encouragement is anticipated from the opening page and is needed more than ever on the last after receiving a global mission from the Lord. We are not left alone.

For what it's worth, this is God's way. When God sent Moses to stare down Pharaoh and demand the release of all God's people, He says to Moses, “*I will be with you*” (Exodus 3:12). When Joshua was sent to lay siege on Jericho's walls with trumpets and shouts, he could faithfully embark on the seemingly ridiculous strategy because God had assured him, “*As I was with Moses, so I will be with you*” (Joshua 3:7; cf. 5:13-15). How do you think a little shepherd boy could take out a towering warrior with a handful of stones before whom every man in Israel trembled? Because of the confidence God's presence inspired in him. David said to the king of Israel, “*The LORD who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine*”, to which Saul replied, “*Go, and the LORD be with you!*” (1 Samuel 17:37). When Paul was rotting away in jail, Jesus stood with him and said, “*Take*

*courage*” (Acts 23:11). God is with His people. That is the most comforting fact imaginable. It’s comforting by the measure that we can perceive the greatness of the God. And when we believe what Jesus has said—that He has authority over all—then His presence is a comfort indeed. This should infuse us with confidence for the mission. We are not alone.

This explains the boldness and the power of many of the earliest Christians. They understood that they were not alone. That boldness and power came from the presence of the Lord. But how was that presence experienced in their life? The Holy Spirit.

It may seem strange to you that Jesus would promise to be with His people always and then shortly thereafter ascend to heaven, leaving them behind on earth. What gives? Fortunately, moments before His ascension He explains how His presence will be experienced in their lives. In Acts 1:8, He says, “*you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*” In a sense, He reiterates the Great Commission. He tells them that He is sending them to the nations and reassures them of His presence. But His presence will be experienced in an even greater way than they had known when He walked among them (cf. John 16:7—“*...it is to your advantage that I go away...*”). The Holy Spirit would indwell them and His presence would give them power to be His witnesses.

And that’s exactly what happened. In Acts 2, the Holy Spirit is given to the people of God and He changes them. The first example offered is Peter. This man who had recently denied even knowing Jesus multiple times for fear of persecution now stands before thousands and doesn’t just claim to know Him but proclaims that He is risen from the dead and that every person within the sound of his voice was guilty before the Lord and needed forgiveness of sins that only the risen Jesus can offer. Shortly thereafter he would stand before the powers who labored successfully to have Jesus killed and tell them that though they crucified Jesus and rejected Him they could not put an end to His ministry any more than death could hold Him down. How do you explain such an about face in Peter’s life? How does a man go from afraid to even admit knowledge of Jesus before strangers to staring down the movers and shakers that had Jesus killed? The answer is given in Acts 4:8—“*Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them...*”

That’s how. The presence of the Lord produced that confidence, that boldness and power. “A Spirit-filled believer is a bold gospel-pouring vessel.”<sup>4</sup> Some of you will be learning about this in one of the studies that begins tonight on the “*armor of God.*” The Spirit of God helps you “*put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace*” (Ephesians 6:15). He helps you say things like Peter said before those men—“*There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved...we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard*” (Acts 4:12, 20).

That’s the kind of confidence and power the Holy Spirit provides. It’s not the kind of power that allows you to rip a phone book in half with your bare hands or requires choreography and pyrotechnics, but power with a Gospel purpose. Power that serves the mission of God. Power that helps us make disciples. It’s a power that, according to Acts 1:8, births Gospel witness. It power for the sake of proclamation. That’s why the Spirit is given to us. Once you understand that it changes the way you view the Holy Spirit and God’s activity in your life.<sup>5</sup>

Let me read you something Francis Chan once wrote that makes this point.

“When people say that they don’t ‘feel close to Jesus,’ I ask them if they are making disciples. After all, his promise to be with us is directly tied to his command to make disciples. While every Christian wants to experience the power of the Holy Spirit, we often forget that the Spirit’s power is given for the purpose of being his witnesses. Experiencing God, which is the longing of every true believer, happens when we are being his witnesses and making disciples.”<sup>6</sup>

In other words, you will never experience God more than when you're submitting your life to the directing of the Holy Spirit. And when we are being carried along by the Spirit, He will be pushing us in the direction of the Great Commission. He moves us all in mysterious harmony to make disciples. Thus, "if we aren't experiencing the atomic power of the Spirit," writes J. A. Medders, "perhaps it's because we aren't doing the things that require him to show up."<sup>7</sup> Things like the Great Commission. Things like Gospel proclamation. Things like disciple-making. Things that change lives and the world. We need the Holy Spirit for all of those things. We don't hold the power to change hearts. He does. We can't manufacture any revival. He must.

To me that's reassuring. Gospel mission and disciple-making doesn't rest on my shoulders, but on His. I don't have to be something, I'm not. I just need Him to direct my life and empower the activity He calls me to engage in. I don't need to know a lot. I just need to know the Gospel of God's glorious grace and know it well. He doesn't look for good speakers to use. He looks for humble people who walk by faith. And that's why ordinary us can be a part of His extraordinary purposes. I love the way Jared Wilson makes this point in a book called *Gospel Deeps*. He writes,

"I am not an expert on missiology or ecclesiology or sociology, but I can read what the Bible says. In its pages I read that the source of the church's power is the Holy Spirit working through the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. No other source is credited with transforming power, not even intelligence or good works, much less creativity and good marketing. Uneducated men with stuttering tongues and unclever speech set the world on fire because they were content to simply arrange the wood and trust the torch of the gospel to do its thing."<sup>8</sup>

Oh, that we would learn this! That our prayers would evidence this kind of desperation for the Spirit of God to move through the Gospel of God. We can't do that heavy lifting! But He can. And He doesn't expect us to. That's why Jesus sent Him to us. And the presence of the Lord that we experience through Him should fill us with confidence as we seek to live out the Great Commission.

The Holy Spirit brings to bear in our lives and in our ministries the same power that raised Jesus from the dead. Resurrection power! That's the kind of powerful presence God makes available to His people to accomplish whatever it is that God calls us to. Does that not inspire confidence in you? What greater power is there in all the universe? We're talking power that would make an atomic bomb jealous. Power that could make a category 5 hurricane look like a sniffle. The kind of power that creates universes from nothing. The Holy Spirit is powerful. You've got to know this about your God! Superman would wear Holy Spirit pajamas.<sup>9</sup>

If the Holy Spirit and the presence of God He brings has that much power at His disposal, then we don't need to fear sharing our faith with the person in the neighboring cubical at work.<sup>10</sup> We don't need to fear laying our lives and ambitions down, if God says go. We don't need to fear our sense of inadequacy to make disciples. It doesn't matter what you can do. It only matters what He can do through you, which is anything He sees fit to accomplish. As Ephesians 3:20 reminds us, God is able to do "*beyond all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us.*" We don't need to fear persecution and suffering that may come from following Jesus. God's got this. He can raise the dead. Trust the Spirit. Lay your life down like a blank check before Him that He can spend on His purposes. Don't be afraid. He has promised to be with us always. Draw comfort by His presence. And keep piling the logs. Keep arranging the wood.

So as we have seen, the authority of Christ inspires submission to the call of the Great Commission. The presence of Christ inspires confidence as we live our lives to accomplish His goals wherever it is that God sends us, among whomever God surrounds us. But there is a third motivating factor in this text that is worth mentioning, though it's often overlooked...

## The Worth of Christ Inspires Worship

Did you notice the context of the Great Commission? The resurrected Jesus appears to the eleven remaining disciples and before He utters a word of the commission, the text notes, “*when they saw him they worshipped him...*” The Great Commission is given in the context of worship.

To be sure, the text also mentions that “*some doubted*”, but let’s cut them a little slack. People dead for days don’t usually come back to life and hang out with you. But the word translated “doubted” is an interesting word, as Daniel Doriani explains.

“The Greek term used here is not the ordinary term for doubt. It does not mean they were unsure whether they believed or not; rather, they believed but hesitated. The eleven disciples—probably with others who came with them—have some faith in Jesus. But not all are ready to worship him. They believe but have not digested all the implications of Jesus’ death and resurrection, which surprised them. Perhaps some of them are not yet sure...that he deserved worship and total obedience. Their hesitation reminds us that the journey toward mature faith is difficult. Even believers hesitate at times. No one understands everything right away, not even the original disciples. We all must grow into maturity. Still, Jesus did commission them and he does commission us.”<sup>11</sup>

The only other place where this particular term for doubt is used in Matthew is in the story where Peter sees Jesus walking on the water and decides to get out of the boat to join him atop the waves. When Peter begins to sink Jesus rescued him and said, “*O you of little faith, why did you doubt?*” (14:31). So again, it’s not the absence of faith (it takes faith to get out a boat thinking that you will be able to walk on water!), but the vacillating in trust that is in view.<sup>12</sup> This explains why, in the Great Commission, Jesus gives the assurances that He does to these men—telling them He has all authority and will always be with them.

But while they are still piecing these things together, some of these men have seen enough to know that Jesus is worthy of their worship. C. S. Lewis once wrote in one of his letters,

“Socrates did not claim to be Zeus, nor did Buddha to be Bramah, nor Mohammed to be Allah. That sort of claim occurs only in Our Lord and in admitted quacks or lunatics. I agree that we don’t ‘demand crystal perfection in other men,’ nor do we find it. But if there is one Man in whom we do find it, and if that one Man also claims to be more than man, what then?”<sup>13</sup>

The answer us worship! It’s very simple, Jesus was one of three things. He was intentionally arrogant or utterly delusional or everything He claimed to be and thus worthy of our worship. He said that God was His Father. He claimed to come from Heaven.<sup>14</sup> He claimed to have existed before Abraham.<sup>15</sup> He predicted that He would die and come back to life.<sup>16</sup> He claimed to be the ruler of all.<sup>17</sup> He said the Scriptures are about Him.<sup>18</sup> And that’s not even the half of it. If I said stuff like that, you’d call the cops so they could get me back to the ward. He’s a liar, a lunatic, or the Lord. Those are the options. The only options. And when we realize that He is the Lord, the only appropriate response is worship.<sup>19</sup>

When we were in Chicago, I loved it when out of town friends came and we got to introduce them to new restaurants that they had never heard of or been to. If they wanted dessert, we were going to Portillo’s to have the best chocolate cake known to mankind. Imagine heavenly manna, a pound of mayonnaise (true story), and enough chocolate icing to make you forget about all the mayo. Amazing. If they were hungry, I was taking them to Mago Grill, the best Mexican and Latin food not created in Mexico or Latin America. Imagine wall to wall luchador masks. Multiple kinds of salsa to devour (that’s kind of my thing). And lunch so good, you’ll stay for dinner.

So friends would come in town and it would begin. “Hey you guys, we have got to go to Mago Grill, you’re going to love it!” or “Let’s just skip dinner and get some Portillo’s cake” or “Better yet, let’s just do both.” My enthusiasm probably made them question what I was most excited about—seeing them or having the opportunity to welcome another food baby into my life, but I digress. You do this, right? Friends come and you get excited about taking them out for the local eats or neighborhood attractions.

Well, the church word for that is *evangelism*. We are pretty enthusiastic evangelists when it comes to our favorite restaurant, or movie, or band, or sports team, or politician, or boyfriend, or girlfriend. But when it comes to the actual *evangel* (the Gospel), we sometimes seem to have no enthusiasm left. The Gospel is amazing, eternity-altering, saving, good news. It’s chocolate cake. It’s not chopped liver. So where’s the enthusiasm? We should be like king David in Psalm 34. Taste and see that the Lord is good. Really good. I have tasted. You got to try this! Come have a taste! Pull up a chair. You’re invited to the table of this heavenly banquet! That’s evangelism. It’s overflow of joy and satisfaction, not some dutiful burden. It’s not the church version of Avon or some Girl Scout cookie campaign.<sup>20</sup> It’s what you do naturally when you are passionate about someone or something.

Here again I love the way Medders puts this in a book that some of you are using in a small group right now,

“Evangelism is cooked in the oven of enjoyment. Gospel mission grows out of gospel enjoyment. Lack of enjoying God and the gospel breeds groggy evangelism and mission that’s as exciting as an empty fishbowl. We lose our gladness over the gospel when we forget the flavor of forgiveness, and then we no longer see the gospel as the powerful news for today, but only as grace for yesterday. The gospel is joyous news for yesterday, today, and tomorrow—and eternity. When the gospel recedes to the margins of our life, it’s no surprise that mission and evangelism become unimportant. But there is good news. Lack of mission can be remedied by finding your joy again. Re-taste and re-see that the Lord is good to scoundrels like you and me. Go back to the glory of the gospel...Gospel on the heart equals gospel on the tongue.”<sup>21</sup>

As we see the worth of Christ, we won’t be able to keep quiet about Him. We can’t think rightly about Jesus and not be drawn to worship. The more we gaze at His glory the more we will be consumed by it. In this way the worth of Christ (and the worship it inspires) is the fuel of mission work and disciple-making. But it’s not just the fuel that ignites Great Commission living. It’s also the goal of Great Commission living. We are living for the day when people from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation gather around the throne of God and offer up the glory due His name (Revelation 7: 9-10).<sup>22</sup> That’s the goal. John Piper is right,

“Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn’t. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. But worship abides forever. So worship is the fuel and goal of missions.”<sup>23</sup>

And what motivation worship truly is because of the inexhaustible worth we find in the object of our worship, Jesus Christ. Let’s live our lives to make Him famous. Let’s never cease to come again and again to His Word to see Him more clearly and worship Him more truly. Let’s never forget the authority that He has over our lives and over every thing in all of creation. And let’s not forget that He has promised to always be with us for the sake of His glory in the nations. If we can keep those three motivations before us—His worth, His authority, and His presence—then we will find the worship, the submission, and the confidence we need to follow where He is leading us. In short, we will make disciples who make disciples. So as this series come to a close, let me say it one more time. It’s time to get going!

Let's pray...

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<sup>1</sup> For example, one of the things I was looking for an opportunity to include in one of the sermons, but never seemed to find a place where it fit properly relates to the meaning of the word “disciple.” If we are called to make disciples, then that means God desires to use His followers to play a part in moving people from “not disciples” to “disciples.” The goal is fully devoted disciple of Christ who in turn make disciples who make disciples. It's important for us to keep that end in sight or else we will get distracted and substitute other ambitions for this primary ambition that Jesus is calling us to live our lives for.

So it's worth pausing for a moment (even if only in this footnote) and just refreshing our memory on what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Back in September of 2014 I preached a sermon called “The Nature of Discipleship,” which was the last sermon in a series studying the first four chapters of Matthew called “Enter the King.” You can find that sermon on our church website easily, so I will refer you there and not use our time this morning to rehash all of that material. Today let's come at it from a different, but complementary, angle. What is a disciple? That's a very important question because the New Testament refers to believers as “disciples” more than it does as “Christians.” The word is essential to our identity as Christ-followers. It is our identity. As one writer puts it,

“We are disciples first and parents, employees, pastors, deacons, and spouses second. Disciple is an identity; everything else is a role. Our roles are temporary but our identity will last forever.” [Jonathan K. Dodson, *Gospel Centered Discipleship* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 29]

If this is true, then the original question takes on a bit more urgency. So what is a disciple? I suppose we could answer that with a dictionary, but we would be missing something because a disciple of Jesus is something unique. It's a relationship without equivalent. Michael Wilkins, who wrote a book called *Following the Master: A Biblical Theology of Discipleship*, states, “the type of relationship is not to be found within the inherent meaning in *mathetes* [i.e., the Greek word for “disciple”] but within the dynamic created by the master and the kind of commitment to him” (Michael J. Wilkins, *Following the Master: A Biblical Theology of Discipleship* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992], 75). In other words, for us to understand what a disciple is we don't need a dictionary only, we need to look at the kind of relationship that Jesus shared with His followers in the New Testament.

A dictionary would tell you that the word for disciple simply means “pupil” or “student.” That's true enough. But there is more to being a disciple of Jesus than simply sitting under His teaching. Like what? Well here Jonathan Dodson has done some tremendous work and I will draw on it for a moment (Dodson, 29-31). He describes the dynamic between Jesus and His disciples in terms of three aspects. There exists a “rational” component, a “relational” component, and a “missional” component.

The rational component is closer to the dictionary definition. A disciple is one who followed Jesus in order to learn from Him. There's a student-teacher relationship at work. This is why when you read Matthew, or the opening books of the New Testament for that matter, you find the disciples following Jesus around and listening to His teaching. They studied under Him. They learned from His stories, parables, and sermons. They sat around Him as He explained to them the Gospel of the Kingdom of God (Matthew 4:23; 9:35; 24:14; Mark 1:14-15). All of this constitutes the rational aspect of being a disciple of Jesus. They are His students.<sup>1</sup>

So, for example, Michael Horton writes,

“*Rabbi* means ‘teacher,’ and in Jesus's day disciples attached themselves to a particular rabbi, coming regularly to the synagogue and sometimes attending the teacher on walks or daily rounds to members of the community. Compared to an ox, the disciple accepted the ‘yoke’ of the master. Hence, in pronouncing his curses upon the religious leaders of his day, Jesus could say, ‘The tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move the with their finger. They do all their deeds to be seen by others’ (Matt. 23:4-5). By contrast, he invites all who are ‘heavy laden’ to come to him for rest: ‘Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.’ (Matt. 11:29).” Horton, *The Gospel Commission*, 137-138.

But the relationship didn't end there, with this student-teacher (rational) relationship. Jesus viewed His disciples as family. This explains a story we find in Matthew 12...

“While [Jesus] was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him. <sup>48</sup> But he replied to the man who told him, ‘Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?’ <sup>49</sup> And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers! <sup>50</sup> For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.’” (Matthew 12:47-50)

So for Jesus, discipleship was not merely a rational exercise, it also has this relational aspect, this family aspect. That's the second component. But there is a third and it's the missional component. In Matthew, when Jesus calls His first disciples, He says, “Follow me and I will make you fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19). That was always the plan. If you are disciple, you are meant to fish for men. You are meant by God to draw others in to Jesus. You are meant for evangelism, for missions. So it shouldn't surprise us that Jesus' initial call to the disciples (4:18ff) and His final Commission to the disciples (28:18ff) has this missional aspect in common.



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With these things in mind, we have a better idea of how Matthew uses the term *disciple*. “A disciple is rational (learner), relational (family), and missional (missionary)” (Dodson, 31). If your definition of disciple doesn’t include these three things, then it’s an incomplete picture of what Matthew has in mind in the Great Commission.

In light of this, it shouldn’t surprise us that the Great Commission, which at its heart is about making disciples, includes initiatives towards all three of these aspects of a disciple. The “going” of the great commission conveys the missional aspect. The “baptizing” the relational. And the “teaching” the rational dimension. All three of these dimensions converge not only in the disciple but also in the task of making disciples.

<sup>2</sup> Much of this section was influenced by the work of David Platt, *Exalting Jesus in Matthew* (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary; Nashville: B&H Books, 2013), 371-375.

<sup>3</sup> He is also “with us” to purify His people (Matthew 18:20).

<sup>4</sup> J. A. Medders, *Gospel Formed: Living a Grace-Addicted, Truth-Filled, Jesus-Exalting Life* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014), 173.

<sup>5</sup> If this is a subject you are wanting to explore more, I would highly recommend that you read a book by J. D. Greear, called *Jesus, Continued...: Why the Spirit Inside You Is Better than Jesus Beside You* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> From the forward by Francis Chan in David Platt’s book called *Follow Me*, by David Platt (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2013), xvi.

<sup>7</sup> Medders, 184. Much of this section was influenced by the last section of his book.

<sup>8</sup> Jared C. Wilson, *Gospel Deeps: Reveling the Excellencies of Jesus* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 45.

<sup>9</sup> Medders, 191.

<sup>10</sup> “Who are we to go to another people group, or even coworkers, and tell them that they are following false idols, and that if they don’t turn to Jesus, they will die forever? The world views this as arrogant, and even as far as many people in the church are concerned, communicating this to people makes no sense. However, if Matthew’s Gospel is true—that is, if Jesus died on the cross for the sins of the world, if He rose from the grave in victory over sin and death, and if there is no one like Him and He reigns as Lord over all—then telling a lost world about Jesus is the only thing that makes sense! What doesn’t make sense is millions of Christians sitting back and saying nothing to the nations. Instead, we ought to go with confidence, knowing that the One who sent us is sovereign over all and worthy of worship from all.” Platt, *Matthew*, 373.

<sup>11</sup> Daniel M. Doriani, *Matthew: Volume 2: Chapters 14-28* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 2008), 531.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 531 n.5.

<sup>13</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis*, vol. 3 (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 1377-78. This citation was drawn from Medders, 179.

<sup>14</sup> John 6:38.

<sup>15</sup> John 8:56-58.

<sup>16</sup> Luke 9:22.

<sup>17</sup> Matthew 28:18.

<sup>18</sup> John 5:39.

<sup>19</sup> Medders, 179-180.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 193-195.

<sup>22</sup> Platt, *Matthew*, 373.

<sup>23</sup> John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions*, 3 ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 15.