

Jesus' Kingdom Movement

The Gospel of Matthew

The Church as the Continuation of Jesus' Mission

Matthew 28:16 – 20

Introduction: Guitar Movement

Back when I was a junior in college, I was the worship leader for my Christian fellowship. And because I wanted other people to be part of the worship team, especially when I graduated, I decided to teach a beginning guitar class. We started with the E chord, which slides up and down the guitar's neck to make other chords. So right away, people were able to play very basic songs. But I also said that this class wasn't free. I wasn't asking for anything for myself. But I did ask them to pay it forward at some point. Could you teach someone else guitar? One of my friends, Cecil, improved on my lessons. He added the guitar tablature early on, and showed people how to read way more chords. So when he taught beginning guitar two or three years later, it was awesome. From that point, I stopped trying to keep track of what was going on with the guitar classes. I got married in 1999 and moved out to Boston. I don't remember how, but early on in my time in Boston, I met a young man from Rochester, NY. And when I introduced myself, he said, 'Hey, wait, you're Mako? Mako Nagasawa?' I said, 'Yeah, have we met before?' He said, 'No, but there's this guy named Jack, and in Rochester we go to the same church. He was a counselor for the youth group, and he taught us guitar. So I learned from Jack, and Jack learned from Cecil, and Cecil learned from you. So I'm your great-grandson in this guitar movement!' That was so fun to see, and I hope it continues.

I share that story because I think illustrates well what the Jesus movement is like. Jesus invested in a few. They invested in others. And so on. That's how the Jesus movement spreads, in a basic sense. So the title of this talk is The Church as the Continuation of Jesus' Mission. There is a core competency and a mission that gets passed down like a baton from runner to runner. Except that Jesus is actually doing far more than just running one leg. He's actually stirring up interest in every single person, at all times, and drawing people to himself. At the same time, he's accompanying his followers, guiding his followers, and giving us strength, compassion, wisdom, and sometimes even strategies to engage other folks.

Relevance:

Jesus brings us into his movement. And his movement is not just to teach us a skill here and there. It's especially not to sit in a seat and just absorb information. What he pours into us, he wants to also pour out of us into others. So we're going to look at one of the passages called the Great Commission passages. There are four biographies of Jesus, called the four Gospels. And at the end of each Gospel account, Jesus commissions his disciples with the mission he has himself. The reason he could commission his followers at that point is because he had died and rose again, and in so doing, perfected a new human nature in himself, a human nature that was finally healed completely by the love of God. So Jesus could share his Spirit with anyone who believes. So that's why the Great Commission comes after the death and resurrection. Jesus' new humanity was for all humanity. So he could only give it then.

Context:

We're going to look at Matthew's version of the Great Commission, mostly because it's the clearest. And also because it's a great example of how the Gospel writers actually structure the body of the narrative for the ending. Here is Matthew 28:16 - 20, the last 5 verses of the book.

High Level View of Matthew

Matthew's Gospel is a teaching curriculum. The very last verse of Matthew says, 'teaching them to observe all that I commanded you.' The question we have to ask is 'what teaching did Jesus command?' Matthew has organized his Gospel around five blocks of Jesus' teaching. Each ends with the marker, 'When Jesus had finished...'

- When Jesus had finished **these words**... (7:28)
- When Jesus had finished giving **instructions**... (11:1)
- When Jesus had finished **these parables**... (13:53)
- When Jesus had finished **these words**... (19:1)
- When Jesus had finished **all these words**... (26:1)

Each year, when my kids start a new grade in September at their elementary school, their teachers meet with us as parents. They tell us what they will cover during the school year. They have a goal of covering a certain amount of topics. They already know to what they will give our children exposure. And by the end of the year, our children should have become competent in those things. This is how all good teachers plan the curriculum they expect to cover. Similarly, Matthew is a good teacher who has planned his curriculum around Jesus' identity and mission. He designed it for us as students, and eventually for us as teachers, too.

The first section (1:1 – 7:28) deals with Jesus' identity and his transformation of the human heart. It's about our character. The second section (8:1 – 11:1) is about the power of Jesus' word. Jesus heals people by his word, which builds the disciples' confidence that his word is powerful, a useful thing since Jesus sends them to do a short-term missions trip to Israel. The third section (11:2 – 13:53) deals with how the kingdom grows. Jesus shows his disciples how to interpret rejection; the Old Testament anticipated this, so it's not a failure of prophecy but a fulfillment. The fourth section (14:1 – 19:1) deals mainly with crossing cultures in ministry. Jesus does ministry with the disciples among the Gentiles, i.e. cross-cultural, multi-ethnic ministry. This is vital hands-on training for the Great Commission. The fifth section (19:2 – 26:1) deals with Jesus' final confrontation with the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem, his parting of ways with them (ethically and socially), and his preparing the disciples for rejection from the powerful.

One thing that we can do with Matthew's Gospel is use it as a kind of diagnostic tool. Some of us need Jesus to work on our hearts. Others of us need to experience the power of his healing word and develop our understanding of it. Others of us need to think more about kingdom expansion, to face our fears of rejection, to sharpen our minds, and get over our discomfort with making spiritual distinctions between true Christians and everyone else. Others might need to expand the range of people to whom we witness. Others may need to understand the key distinctions between Jesus and other figures – religious, literary, philosophical, or political – even if it reproduces the same conflicts Jesus experienced in his final days in Jerusalem. Spend some time thinking and praying about where you have been more or less developed. You might sense the Lord leading you to develop some area of your life. Then comes a climactic summary epilogue where Jesus dies and rises again, and tells his disciples to 'go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...teaching them to observe all that I commanded you.' That statement summarizes what came before. Look at the structure when we put the capstone at the end:

- When Jesus had finished **these words**... (7:28)
- When Jesus had finished giving **instructions**... (11:1)
- When Jesus had finished **these parables**... (13:53)
- When Jesus had finished **these words**... (19:1)
- When Jesus had finished **all these words**... (26:1)
- Teaching them to observe all that I commanded you. (28:20)

What does this mean about the function of Matthew's Gospel? Matthew has structured his book in the form of a new Torah. The original Torah is the five books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The sheer length of that material made the Jewish people divide it into five scrolls. Just as the Torah is the foundational document, the constitution, or charter of Mosaic Israel, so Jesus' teaching is the foundation, the constitution, and the charter of the church.

Our founding charter document commissions us to make disciples. But, just for the sake of clarity, it would be fair to say that it commissions us to make disciples. That is, a disciple is someone who can do evangelism, help bring someone into Jesus' kingdom, and nurture and mentor that person. We are supposed to be able to develop a person from the threshold of faith in Jesus into maturity and then into someone who can disciple others in the same way. And those disciples of theirs are supposed to make disciples, and so on and so on. It's as if Matthew is saying to us, 'Go therefore and make disciples. Carry this book with you wherever you go, and put it to good use.' So that's the high level glance at the church as the continuation of Jesus' mission. Let's dive into the details.

The Mountain in Galilee: v.16

^{28:16} But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated.

Why does Jesus take them to this spot? One reason is pragmatic. He takes his disciples to a mountain so they can see all around them. He wants them to visualize what he's talking about. Also, Galilee is the region that was the most diverse. Both Jews and Gentiles lived around the Sea of Galilee. In some sense, to a Jewish person, it represented the diversity of the world (Mt.4:15). But there are poetic reasons, too. It's possible that the mountain Jesus is standing on with his disciples is the same mountain that Satan once tempted him on, when Satan said to worship him and he would give Jesus authority over the nations (Mt.4:8 – 11). If that's the case, then Jesus has gone back to that place for his own personal reasons. He is saying, 'Now, that authority is mine.'

Also, in the Old Testament, God always began things on mountains. Eden was a mountain (Ezk.28:13 - 14). God wanted humanity to spread the garden of Eden over the wild creation, taming it. Sinai was a mountain. God wanted Israel to gather there, and then spread out over the new garden land. Zion was a mountain. God wanted Israel to gather there to reenact what happened on Sinai, and spread out over the garden land in the security of the covenant renewed. So the fact that Jesus uses this mountain as one of the places to help his disciples enter his mission is powerful as enacted poetry.

Worship Jesus as God: v.17

Which might be why the disciples worshiped Jesus as God: ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some were doubtful.'

Now Matthew is still a deeply Jewish book. And in Jewish life, no one was to worship anyone else or anything else other than God Himself. For Matthew to add this little detail speaks volumes of how we are to look at Jesus. We are to worship him. He is God. That much is clear from his name Jesus or Joshua, which means 'God is salvation.' It's also clear from his title Immanuel, which means God with us. When the magi came from the East when Jesus was born, they worshiped the baby Jesus. Now the disciples worship him. That just underscores the fact that Jesus' mission is really God's mission. This mission we are entering into is God's own mission.

Yes, 'some were doubtful.' What did they doubt? I'm interpreting that to mean not that some doubted that it was Jesus, or that some doubted Jesus' identity as God incarnate. By that point, I think that kind of stuff was settled. But I do think they doubted the mission. Is this really going to work??? Are we really doing this??? I get that. There have been many times where I praise Jesus, sing to Jesus, worship Jesus, and then I look out at my neighborhood, or the people in my life, and think, 'I don't know.' And then I look at myself, and I really think, 'I don't know. You want to use me, Jesus??' You might feel that way, too. You might feel too limited, too busy, too inexperienced. Does Jesus really want to use you?

Yes! He does! He can take you and your doubts and still work through you. In fact, this is the framework for your growth. When Jesus called you, and began working in your life, it wasn't just for you. It was for others. It's just like when Jesus called the first disciples, and healed Simon Peter's mother in law, for example. It wasn't just for them. It was for others. It was so others could hear the story.

Jesus' Authority: v.18

So v.18 has to be read as Jesus' assurance to his disciples and to us. They know from the Hebrew Scriptures that God's love has always been for the whole creation, at least in some sense. They know from Isaiah and Micah that the word of the Lord will go forth to the coastlands, with sword beaten into plows and spears into pruning hooks. God's claim on the world goes back to the fact that He is the Creator, and Creator of every single person. The disciples doubt that they can do it, or they fear that the mission will take the same form as it did for Jesus, since it led to his death. They watched him die. Do they really want a part in that? So in v.18, Jesus speaks to that: ¹⁸ And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth.' The answer to our doubts, fears, and self-guessing is Jesus' authority. What authority does Jesus have? That is a really important topic.

Illus: Let me tell you a story first, and then I'll explain why I tell it. This photo is Dr. Evan O'Neill Kane (April 6, 1861 – April 1, 1932) operating on himself at the age of 60. He is removing his own appendix. He did this on February 15, 1921. The reports I've read do not indicate that his appendix had ruptured. He didn't need to remove it. He just wanted to remove it. Why? Dr. Kane believed that general anesthesia, which was always used in this procedure before, was more dangerous than local anesthesia. He was treating other patients who had health conditions that made general anesthesia problematic. In this case, the general anesthesia was ether. Some patients

could not be treated that way. But before Dr. Kane could prove that local anesthesia worked on his patients, he decided to be his own patient. In a sense, he loved his patients enough that he decided to become one of them. He wanted to experience surgery from the patient's perspective. Dr. Kane performed the operation with mirrors to enable him to see the work area. At this time, the appendix operation was much more major than today. Today, we use a modern keyhole surgery technique. Back then, the incision was much larger. Happily, Dr. Kane was well enough to be taken home the following day. ("Dr. Kane Recovering", New York Times, February 17, 1921, p.6) Now Dr. Kane performed many surgeries on people after that using local anesthesia. Of course, those were acts of love and service to other people. And yet, the surgery he performed on himself was the starting point, the source. It was the decisive moment, the focal point, and the source from which Dr. Kane performed every other surgery. He took all the risk on himself first. He took the greatest risk on himself first. Every other surgery was an aspect of that surgery, a hint of it, a shadow of the surgery he had already performed on himself.

When God stepped out of heaven and into Mary's womb, God became both patient and surgeon. He performed a type of surgery on himself for almost 40 years to change his own human nature. His surgical cuts in himself rooted out the human selfishness, our resistance to the Father, and every desire that was never meant to be in the human heart. But he had to go beyond removing one organ because his whole being was infected. He took on this disease that he struggled against his whole life. And he was successful where everyone else failed. He never sinned. He never gave in. So he bent human nature back to love the Father, and perfected the antibodies in himself. When he gave himself back to us, our maker became our healer. Our Creator became our Savior by recreating us. He did it first in the body of Jesus, and he does it now in our bodies by his Spirit and by his teaching.

The reason I share that story is because it helps us understand Jesus' authority. Jesus' authority is authoritative because he is the only one who has healed humanity, and can heal humanity. His is the expertise of a healer. A lot of the time we think of authority in terms of human military or political or physical power. And if that's the case, then we project that kind of authority onto Jesus as if that's what his authority is about. It's not. Jesus' authority flows from him because he gives life, and all life actually depends on him. He defines life because he spoke life into being, and everything that lives must listen to his voice. He defines how we cultivate life in ourselves. That's why Jesus connects his authority to his teaching. He defines what it means to be human, to be God's true humanity.

God the Father has not given authority over you to your parents. He has not given authority over you to your professors. He has not given authority over you to your own fears and ambitions. He has given authority over you to His Son, Jesus. Only him. And by his authority, Jesus frees us even from the power of evil, self-centeredness, and all the forces that are aligned against God to destroy humanity and rip us apart.

How We Continue Jesus' Mission - Making Disciples: v.19 - 20

So what does Jesus call us to do? To make disciples. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.'

Not shallow converts. Disciples. Not people who watch preachers for entertainment. Disciples. Not people who just sit in a circle never actually resolving their questions about Scripture. Disciples. Learners. Those who learn and do. In Star Wars terms, it's a padawan learner. The goal of a padawan learner is not to stay a learner. It's to grow into a Jedi knight, and take a padawan learner for yourself, so the knowledge of the Jedi can be passed on. It's someone who learns guitar and then turns around and teaches others, who pays it forward. The point is not to become fanboys and fangirls of a charismatic teacher. The point is to pour out what's been poured into you. Once again, disciples are those who learn from Jesus. And they become disciplers.

Illus: Let me give you an illustration of how I've learned to do this. During my freshman year of college, I met a grad student named David who was passionate about discipling. David is now a professor of sociology at Azusa Pacific University and is still a man I look up to very much. We met up weekly and he took me through Matthew 5 - 7, the section called 'The Sermon on the Mount' where Jesus talks about transforming the human heart. That summer, I went home and I wanted to share what I had been learning. I asked my mentors at home what they thought and they encouraged me to do something. So I organized a Bible study for friends my age, both from my high school and from my church so they could meet each other. So before the first meeting, I got there early to set up and pray. That's when it hit me that I had never done anything like this. Within the span of thirty minutes, I had to go to the bathroom three times! But the first time went well. At the second meeting, two people reconciled with

each other right in front of us. More people came. More good things happened. I learned a lot from that. Now, back then, I was not thinking about how to prepare others to do the same. I just had my notes from my meetings with David. But after that, I started to see the value of not just passing on an experience of Jesus, but also passing on a curriculum. So in 2006, I and my friend Gary, who is now a pastor and also a professor of justice and mission at Denver Seminary, wrote a small group curriculum about Jesus' practices of giving to the poor, aimed at simplicity for the sake of generosity in community. That curriculum has been used by other groups in Boston alone to mobilize \$750,000 as of December 2014. Last year, I wrote another curriculum about biblical restorative justice. This one used Michelle Alexander's book *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. I explored doing political advocacy to change our criminal justice system and how it treats black and brown people especially. That curriculum has been used at Princeton and Duke, I'm preparing other people to use it in Nashville, TN. And right now, I'm leading a neighborhood group in Dorchester with a mixed group of Christians, atheists, and a Muslim. In it, I'm training two people from my church who want to take it into Boston Public Schools and the Codman Square Health Clinic. This is exciting stuff!!

How does Jesus want to engage the world? And notice it is the world he talks about. 'All nations' means people groups from everywhere. *Everywhere!!!* And notice what happens when we do? It's not that Jesus sits back and says, 'Hey, great job.' Jesus shows us that he is with us. Jesus says, 'And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.' And that's the end of Matthew's Gospel. Now Luke and John end their Gospel stories differently. They make it clear that Jesus ascends to heaven and sends his Spirit to be with us. So in their narratives, it's the person of the Spirit of God who goes with us. But in Matthew's Gospel, it is the person of the Son of God who goes with us. Of course Matthew would agree with Luke and John, but it's interesting that he cuts the story off here. The impression he gives us is that Jesus is going with us. This ties up the meaning of the name 'Immanuel,' God with us from Matthew 1:23. And that is true. Jesus is with us, and goes with us, in mission! He doesn't just use us as pawns. This is a way for us to *know him better*. He heals us as we go. Our hearts get bigger, and our lives get bigger, as we go with him.

Now by this time, twenty five years after my first encounters with Jesus in Matthew, I've written up a bunch of stuff. So if you're interested in learning more about Matthew's Gospel, here are some things. Devotionals. Small group leader notes with questions that can guide you individually or in a group discussion. Evangelism notes.