

PRELUDE TO THE GREAT COMMISSION

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By Pastor Stan
Matthew 28:16-18

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INTRO.

-- We have been going through the Gospel of Matthew, and today we come to the final scene in this great book - the giving of the Great Commission. The theme that Matthew pursues throughout this Gospel is "Jesus, the Sovereign King," and in today's passage we find the climax of that theme.

Matthew 28:16-18 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. 17 And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. 18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

-- These verses serve as a prelude to the Great Commission, which we will look at next week.

I. The Actions of the Disciples (vv. 16-17)

-- This prelude to the Great Commission begins with a description of the actions of the disciples.
vv. 16-17

A. Where They Went (v. 16)

1. Galilee

a. This is probably two or three weeks after Jesus' Resurrection. Jesus' twelve disciples are now eleven because Judas, committed suicide after betraying Jesus. Eleven have now left Jerusalem and have gone back north to their home territory of Galilee, just as Jesus had instructed.

Cf., 28:7, 10

b. Galilee was, of course, where Jesus had started His public ministry.

-- cf., 4:12-17

-- Galilee was sometimes referred to as "Galilee of the Gentiles" because it surrounded by Gentile countries. It's significant that Jesus would not give the Great Commission in Jerusalem, the center of Judaism, but in Galilee, the neighbor to Gentile populations.

2. Mountain

-- Jesus instructed the disciples to go to a particular mountain in Galilee. Matthew doesn't tell us which mountain, but there is a symbolic significance in their gathering on a mountain because mountains in the Bible are places where people meet with God, where God appears, speaks and acts. We see the significance of mountains often in Jesus' ministry. Jesus' first sermon was on a mountain. Jesus fed the multitudes on a mountain. Jesus revealed His identity as the Messiah on a mountain. And it will be on a mountain that Jesus will give His Church its "Great Commission."

-- So, in this prelude to that Great Commission the Disciples gathered on a mountain, and the resurrected Jesus appeared to them.

B. What The Disciples Did (v. 17)

-- Notice what the Disciples did when Jesus appeared to them.

v. 17

1. They Worshipped.

-- Matthew says that as soon as the disciples saw the risen Jesus, they "worshipped" Him.

-- That's the same thing we saw back in verse 9. When the resurrected Jesus appeared to the women, they immediately fell to their knees and began to worship Him.

The natural response to seeing the risen Savior is worship. The heart of discipleship is worship. We see that in the "Disciple's Cross" diagram.

2. They Doubted.

-- Matthew then makes an intriguing observation.
"but some doubted"

a. The term that Matthew uses here doesn't have the idea of unbelief as much as of uncertainty or, possibly, hesitancy.

b. Two Possible Groups

-- Commentators are divided over exactly to whom Matthew is referring in this statement.

(1) Many commentators believe that Matthew is talking about "The Eleven" Disciples. It seems strange, however, that while the Eleven Disciples were worshipping the risen Jesus, that some of those same Disciples would also be "doubting." But it is possible to have faith and to struggle with doubt. Remember the story of the father with a demon possessed son. When Jesus told the father that all things are possible to those who believe, the father replied, "I believe; help my unbelief." (Mark 9:24)

(2) Many commentators, however, believe that the worshipping disciples and the doubting disciples were two different groups. The worshipping disciples were the Eleven, who had already seen the resurrected Jesus a couple of times in Jerusalem. But there were "other" disciples who were also gathered on the mountain. In fact, many commentators believe that this many have been the incident mentioned by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:6 where more than 500 disciples saw the resurrected Jesus. If so, this would have been the first time that they would have seen Jesus since the Resurrection, and, like Thomas who wouldn't believe Jesus was alive without touching Jesus' wounds, many of these other disciples could have understandably been struggling with their faith.

II. The Actions of Jesus (v. 18)

-- Then in verse 18, Matthew tells us what Jesus did to prepare these disciples for the final instructions that would change the world - the Great Commission.

A. He Came to Them.

-- Jesus responded to the doubt-troubled disciples not by berating them but by drawing near to them. He didn't stay far off and remote but drew near to reassure them and to strengthen their faith and to prepare them for their mission.

B. He Spoke to Them.

-- v. 18b, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."

1. To make a statement like that, Jesus had to be either a megalomaniac charlatan (a hundred times worse than Hitler), or a complete lunatic who had lost all touch with reality, or God - for the sovereign God is the only one who can make that statement truthfully.

2. Notice that Jesus was talking about not just power but authority. Power is the ability to act; authority is the right to act. Authority, as Jesus uses the term here, is the right and power to accomplish what one desires.

3. Jesus declared that His authority is absolute.

a. It is absolute authority because it is not limited by any degree - it is "all" authority.

b. And it is absolute authority because it is not limited to a certain sphere - it is supreme both "in heaven" and "on earth."

(1) "In Heaven"

-- It is the supreme authority in heaven, which means that it is authority over all the angelic hosts. Think for a moment about that. Look back to what happened when one angel descended from heaven.

Cf., 28:2-4

--That's just one angel. Jesus declared in the Garden of Gethsemane that He could 12 legions (60,000) angels. The NT pictures Jesus returning to earth like a sovereign general, riding on a majestic white stallion, leading armies of angels too great to number. That is authority.

(2) "On Earth"

-- But Jesus' authority isn't limited to heaven - His authority extends over all the earth. He has authority over all nations and cultures. He has authority over all congresses and courts. He has authority over all peoples and over every life. He has authority over your career. He has authority over your business. He has authority over your marriage and family. He has authority over your entertainment. He has authority over your body. He has authority over your values and beliefs.

Political parties don't have the right to tell you what to believe; only Christ has that right. Political candidates can't tell you what is moral and immoral; only God has that right. Governments can legalize something, but they can't make it right. Governments can legalize abortion, but they can't make it moral or right. Governments can legalize same-sex marriages, and cultures can endorse and promote gay lifestyles, but that doesn't make those lifestyles moral or right. Governments can tell you what's legal. Only God can tell you what's right.

c. "Has been given to me"

-- Jesus here is taking us back to the Covenant of Redemption declared by the Trinity in eternity past. Before the creation of the universe, the Father appointed to Son to be the Redeemer of lost sinners, and the Son determined to give Himself to make atonement for our sins, and the Father promised to place all things under the Son's authority. That's what Daniel envisions.

Daniel 7:13-14 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. 14 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.

And that's what Paul envisions.

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

CONCLUSION

As we have indicated on the bulletin cover during this series, Matthew's theme is "Jesus, the Sovereign King." That theme reaches its zenith in today's passage when Jesus declares, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." The Sovereign King is now ready to give the commission that He will use to establish, extend and expand His Kingdom. That's what we will look at next