

WHAT DO WE DO NOW?

Matthew 28:16-20

One of the things that is taught in project planning is that the “plan” needs to go beyond the completion of the present job. In other words, when we complete the current job, what do we do now? Many times, we simply don’t know what is next since we don’t have access to the grand overview; however, we should be anticipating some possible next steps. An example of such a consideration that all of us have been through is related to events such as graduation or even retirement. When a teenager finishes high school, he or she should have already thought about and even made plans for finding a job, going to college, getting some training, or moving into the basement with his or her parents. Take that situation out some 40 years and the retirement event comes up and sometimes some of us don’t have a clue as to what we plan to do when we have retired.

Try to imagine being in the sandals of the disciples and other followers of this Man named Jesus of Nazareth and we come to a situation where a lot of strange things had happened that were totally contrary to what and where we thought this whole project was going. He had been arrested, crucified, resurrected, appeared to various people, and given them instructions to leave Jerusalem and meet Him in Galilee which was about seventy miles away. I would guess that were many questions related to “what do we do now?” swirling around in their minds. Some thought about returning to fishing and who knows what else.

Obedience, Worship, and Doubt – 28:16-17

¹⁶ But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated. ¹⁷ When they saw Him, they worshiped *Him*; but some were doubtful. Matthew 28:16-17 (NASB95)

The disciples of Jesus had experienced many things during the three and a half years He was with them. He had taught them many things and most of the time it seemed that they had trouble grasping the overall significance of each event. After the crucifixion and the resurrection, the disciples had time to reflect on the events and happenings and could perhaps start seeing how individual things fit together. However, that understanding was slow in developing.

One of the instructions that Jesus sent to His disciples was that they were to meet with Him in a specified place or mountain in Galilee. Though they were uncertain about a lot of things, they did as He instructed. To the credit of those we call disciples, they were obedient even though they did not have a full understanding of the overall plan. Is this not where we are today? There are many things we are unsure about; however, we know enough to realize that He is Lord and He is to be obeyed. As already noted, there were additional meetings with the disciples, however, this particular one was significant in that instructions were given to them regarding what was to happen next regarding the overall plan.

Jesus met them on the mountain in Galilee. Was He there as they arrived or did He walk in later or did He just appear as had happened in another meeting? We are not told the details. Matthew did point out that these followers responded to the presence of Jesus with worship. Usually worship in the way it was expressed during that time was by some form of physical bowing to show respect to the One being worshiped. This also was the response that is recorded in the Gospel accounts of those who met the risen Lord on other occasions.

Matthew also noted that some of them doubted. We usually associate doubt with the idea of unbelief. The Greek word that is translated as “doubt” in this case would be closer to our idea of wavering or being uncertain. I think that most of us can identify with that in that we

frequently are cautious and uncertain because we don't know what we should do right now. How many times have we said or thought, "It would be great if God would just tell me what I should do." The cure for that uncertainty or that kind of doubt is to have confidence in Him and to listen to what He tells us to do.

Authority and Power – 28:18

¹⁸ And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Matthew 28:18 (NASB95)

Lest there be any doubts as to authority of the Risen Lord to command and instruct His followers, Jesus told them very plainly that He had the right and the ability both to instruct and to empower them to do what He wanted to accomplish through them.

Prior to the work of the Cross which involved the false accusations and unjust murder of Someone over Whom the devil had no authority, we see that the devil exercised authority over the kingdoms of the earth. He was so sure of that authority that he offered to cede that authority to Jesus during the temptation in the wilderness if Jesus would just bow down and worship him. We know that did not happen.

As the one in authority over fallen mankind, the devil had the right to do (with impunity) whatever he pleased with his slave subjects. However, he did not have such impunity to do whatever he wanted to those who were not subject to him. That means that every human born of Adam's race was subject to him. He had it made until Jesus was born of a virgin and was not of the seed of Adam. Jesus could not be claimed as his subject unless Jesus would sin or bow down and worship the devil. Since that did not happen, the Cross turned out to be the undoing of the devil's authority since he (those who were subject to him) killed an innocent person over whom he had no authority. The Resurrection was the vindication or proof that Jesus was the sinless Son of God and the devil lost his authority.

After the Cross and the Resurrection all authority resided in Christ. Recall that (in the wilderness temptation) the devil had offered the kingdoms of this earth to Jesus. Now we see that in His faithfulness to the will of God, Jesus possesses the authority over everything, not only in the physical realm (earth), but also in the spiritual realm (heaven).

Does the devil still have influence and does he still cause problems and does he still oppose what God is doing? Yes, but he has no authority to do so. The unlawful elements in our society have influence and cause problems and oppose what the legitimate government is doing, but these lawless ones have no authority. Since the devil has no authority, then he can't "make" anyone do anything. We have to willingly cooperate with him to allow him to directly influence or impact our lives. The remedy for the devil's temptations is to rebuke him and he will flee from us.

Since Jesus has all authority, then we can have ultimate confidence that what He tells us to do is exactly right and it will be successful. So, what do we do now?

Mission – 28:19-20

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." Matthew 28:19-20 (NASB95)

The subject of baptism – what it means and how to do it – has been debated and discussed for nearly two thousand years. The issues have covered almost every imaginable aspect of the subject from such things as infant baptism versus believers baptism, questions regarding "sprinkling" versus immersion, debates regarding the necessity of baptism for

salvation, whether to baptize facing forward, leaning backward, or to simply go straight down in the water. There have been questions about being re-baptized as an adult since when the person was first baptized they were so young they did not understand the significance of what they did.

I checked seven different commentaries to find what these stated about the subject of “baptizing” and there is a reasonable consistency among these. We find expressions such as

- (1) identifying believers with a local assembly (Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary)
- (2) total commitment to the new community (symbolized in baptism) (New Bible Commentary)
- (3) associate a believer with the person of Jesus Christ and with the Triune God. (The Bible Knowledge Commentary)
- (4) expressed this faith by being baptized. (The Bible Exposition Commentary)
- (5) admit disciples by the *sacred rite of baptism*; Baptism is a sacrament, that is, it is an oath; (Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible)
- (6) Applying to them water, as an emblem of the purifying influences of the Christian religion through the Holy Spirit (Barnes New Testament Notes)
- (7) “baptize” or “dip” them, as Munster’s Hebrew Gospel renders it; that is, in water, which, though not expressed, is implied; (John Gill’s Expositor)

Picking out the key words in these references, we can conclude that many see baptism as a means of identifying with the church, it symbolizes commitment, it implies an association with God through Christ, it is an expression of faith, a sacred rite, a sacrament, an oath, it’s an emblem of purifying influences of Christianity, and it involves being dipped in water. The consistency in all these is that it becomes obvious that baptism is seen as a symbolic ritual that involves a physical exercise that is an emblematic expression or testimony.

The objective and only commandment of the Great Commission is not GO, it is not BAPTIZE, and it is not TEACH. The desired result is not travel to the ends of the earth, it is not proclamation or teaching and it is not having multitudes of people respond to an invitation to be dipped in water. What counts is to make disciples of all people groups or nations. The going, the baptizing and the teaching are the means (methods) to the end (objective) of making disciples.

Our question then should be, “How do we make disciples?” The answer given in the Scripture text is “baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” And just like that we have created a disciple! Really? How does carrying out a symbolic ritual turn a recent believer into a disciple? The implementation of the Kingdom of God through the Good News of what God has done for humanity in Christ is not accomplished by performing a ritual. Since we believe that the Word of God is without error, then the problem is not in what the Scriptures tell us about “making disciples.” The problem has to be related to our understanding of what the words actually mean. It seems that we have a reasonable understanding of the **ritual**, but we really need to address the **reality**.

It is fairly safe to conclude that something may have been lost in translation and this has created a communication problem. Let’s begin with the word “therefore” which is obviously a reference to the claim of authority of Christ. Since He has all authority He commands or commissions us to do something. Since He is God, the Son, He enables us to carry out what we are commissioned to do.

The next word that we want to examine is “go.” The literal translation is “going” and the meaning is that “as we are going” about life and our everyday activities that we are to do something. Our typical thought about this is that we are expected to change our lives, become full time missionaries and go to a remote part of the world and tell people about Jesus. That then becomes a very limited participation endeavor and the majority of Christians don’t see this

applicable to themselves except when their church does an evangelism emphasis campaign or they do weekly visitations assignments.

What about the word “baptizing?” Can we assume that something got lost in translation? It would be difficult to make that argument since the word was not translated from the Greek text but was simply made into an Anglicized version of the Greek word “baptizo.” This is called transliteration. The English equivalent of the word baptizo is “immerse.”

Why didn’t the translators just use the word “immerse?” The answer to that question produces a series of other questions. Who commissioned the translation work of the 1611 authorized version? The obvious answer is King James. What was his church affiliation? We know he was Anglican. How did Anglicans carry out baptisms? Historical evidence is that they used sprinkling which they called “baptizing.”

Interestingly, all translations I have checked still use the word “baptizing” and none use the word “immersing.” If we were to incorporate this language into the Great Commission, then it would read something like “Go and make disciples of all nations, **immersing** them in the name of the Father . . .”

As good Baptists, we would not have any problem with that. Let’s look at one more word – “name.” In the “churchy” world in which we operate, we feel pretty comfortable in using the phrase “in the name of.” Most of us end our prayers with “these things we ask in Jesus’ name.” The reason we do that is that He told us, “Whatever things you ask in My name, that will I do.” But what did Jesus mean by “ask in My name?” Did He mean that we are just to put a “tag line” at the end of every prayer and that takes care of the criterion of “asking in His name?” I don’t think so! To ask for something in His name is to ask “according to His will” and “according to that which is aligned with His character” and “that for which He stands.”

If we go to Strong’s Numbers and looking up the word “name” we can read what was meant by the term.

The name is used for everything which the name covers, everything the thought or feeling of which is aroused in the mind by mentioning, hearing, remembering, the name, i.e. for one’s rank, authority, interests, pleasure, command, excellences, deeds etc. It represents the person (or character) of the one referred to by name. It could also be the cause or reason associated with the one named.

Let’s do one more word. The simple little preposition “in.” The Greek word that is most often translated as the English word “in” is “en.” The Greek word used here is “eis” and the most frequent translation of that Greek word is the English word “into.” (A familiar example of this usage is in the Lord’s prayer where we see “lead us not into temptation.”)

So, if we put all of this together, then the Great Commission would read, “Therefore, as you are going make disciples of all nations, immersing them into the very character of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Teaching them to observe all things . . .”

We should know that the **desired outcome** of our following the Great Commission is **making disciples**. How are disciples made – by immersing believers into the very character of the triune God. (We must be careful to not confuse the ordinance – rite or ritual – of baptism with the reality of immersing believers into the character of God.) Making disciples is what Christian spiritual maturity is all about.

How can this be accomplished? How can believers be immersed into the character of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The way this is done is to teach them whatsoever things Christ taught and commanded His disciples. The ability to accomplish this “disciple making” is supplied to those who are making disciples and also to those who are becoming disciples. We

see the key in the last part of verse twenty. The mission of the Great Commission can be accomplished because Christ is with us right now and will remain so until the end of the age.