

THE TRIUMPH OF GOD THROUGH THE WORK OF THE CHURCH

Matthew 28:16-20

Please review this week's catechism question.

INTRODUCTION

If you were to randomly survey 100 people living in Janesville, what kinds of answers would you get to these two questions: What do you think is the purpose for which churches exist? What do you think is/are the primary job/jobs of churches?

People have many different ideas about why churches exist and what work churches are to engage in. However, every Christian and every church ought to be most concerned about what God says concerning the purpose and work of the church. In the final paragraph of Matthew's gospel we find exactly that. Matthew is concluding his biography of life of Jesus while he lived on the earth but he is also beginning the story of the church. In this final encounter that Matthew records between Jesus and his disciples, we find three reasons why Jesus created the church.

STUDY

1. Compare and contrast this encounter between Jesus and his disciples upon an unnamed mountain in Galilee with Yahweh's encounter with Moses and the people of Israel upon Mt. Sinai. See Exodus 3:9-12, 19:1-8, 24:1-8.

No other gospel writer records this meeting of Jesus with the eleven disciples on an unnamed mountain in Galilee. One of the things that we have regularly seen in Matthew's gospel is how intent he is on making sure we know that Jesus is the fulfillment of and the one who fulfills the entire OT. As Jesus himself said in Matthew 5:17, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law and the Prophets. I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." Matthew ends his biography of Jesus by emphasizing again how Jesus has fulfilled the OT. This

meeting on the mountain recalls the meeting of Yahweh on Mt. Sinai with Moses. Moses and the people worshipped God on that mountain. Moses received the word of God that he was to teach to the people of God on that mountain. The word of God which he taught was a word that was to be obeyed. It was on that mountain that God confirmed that he, the sovereign Lord over all the nations, had chosen Israel, out of all the nations, to be his people, his treasured possession. So on this mountain, Jesus, the sovereign Lord of the universe, confirms the disciples and all who become disciples through them from all the nations of the world, to be his people. He establishes his church as the people with whom he dwells and through whom he extends the effects of his death and resurrection. Jesus confirms his words as the word of God and the rule governing the life of the church. In short, Matthew in the way he records this event shows that the church, made up of disciples from all the nations, not just Israel, has become the people of God in place of Israel.

2. According to v. 17, what is the first response of the church to Jesus?

We worship him.

3. How would you describe this worship? What is it and what motivates it? (CLUE: consider what is it that motivates people to worship sports or movies or their parents or their job or their yard, etc?)

The disciples are amazed at the power of the resurrected Christ. They watched him die and now here he is alive. The thing that is most obvious about the church is that it worships Jesus. The distinguishing mark of a Christian and of a Christian church is the centrality of the person of Christ. Christians are passionate about Jesus. He is the chief preoccupation of our lives. He is first and preeminent in our affections. He is our life. Jesus Christ did not die on a cross and rise from the dead because God needs our help. He died upon that cross because we need his help. He died to bring us to God. Jesus is the center of our attention and affections because we know he is God become man to die upon the cross for all the sins of all who trust him and who rose from the dead to give eternal life to all who trust him.

Life is about God, about knowing, loving, trusting and obeying him because he is the treasure of our lives. Everyone worships what he or she delights in. Worship is not a duty. It is a delight. You cannot help but worship what you love, what you admire, what you are depending upon to be happy. When the disciples see the resurrected Jesus they cannot help but worship. They are so overcome with the greatness of Jesus and so delighted with his love for them as evidenced by his death in their place that they have to worship him.

4. What else does Matthew tell us about the eleven disciples in v. 17? What does this mean and why does Matthew tell us this? (Compare with Matthew 14:22-31 where the only other use of this Greek word for doubt is used in the NT.)

The eleven worshipped but some doubted. The word for doubted is used only one other time in the NT. In Matthew 14, we are told about the time when Jesus walked on the water to the disciples who were in a boat that was in danger of being swamped by a storm on the Sea of Galilee. If you will remember, Peter, upon seeing Jesus walking on the water said, "If it is you Lord, command me to come to you." Jesus commands him to come and so Peter begins to walk towards Jesus on the water, "But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and beginning to sink, cried out, 'Lord, save me.' Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. 'You of little faith,' he said, 'why did you doubt?'" Peter was overwhelmed with the circumstances that he found himself in and saw the danger more than he saw the ability of Jesus to save him. He didn't deny Jesus, he doubted Jesus' ability to save him and so he wavered in his confidence in Him. So it is when the church gathers together. We come here to worship Jesus. However, we often come with hearts full of doubt. Doubt is not unbelief, we see unbelief in the religious leaders and soldiers. That is part of Matthew's purpose in setting the unbelief of the religious leaders and soldiers next to this picture of the disciples. Doubt is being in two minds. I want to trust Jesus but I'm not sure that he is able to be for me all I need. I'm not sure this is going to work. Matthew tells us this to show us that faith is not an automatic thing that will immediately be there if you get enough miracles shown to you. Christians are in a process and sometimes worship and sometimes doubt.

5. When do you doubt Christ's ability to be sufficient for you? What circumstances most often cause you to question the ability of Jesus to save you?

6. What should we do if we find ourselves doubting?

Keep coming to Jesus. Don't quit. This is such a remarkable picture of the church. It is so encouraging. Here we have these 11 men who have spent the last three years with Jesus as witnesses to his miracles and teaching. They are seeing him in his resurrected state and yet there is doubt in some of them. They are not sure that this is really going to work, that a crucified, resurrected Christ can really be the Savior of the world and the chief passion of their lives. Yet, they still come to him. I know that many of you are in that same position this morning. What will you do about it? You have to keep coming to him, keep seeking him. The Bible is clear, all who seek, find. But if you quit coming to him you will not find.

The resurrected Christ calls into existence the new people of God, the church and so every local church worships Christ and helps those who doubt.

7. What does Jesus say to the worshipping/doubting disciples in v. 18? What does this mean? Why does he say this?

The next thing that Matthew wants to leave ringing in our ears is the awesome assertion of Jesus, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth." Jesus is king over everything. He rules over what is happening in Iraq. He rules over the sun, the moon and the stars. He rules over Wall Street. He rules over what happens in the U.S. Senate. He rules over your boss. He rules over your rebellious teenager. He rules over your rebellious heart. He is the absolute sovereign in the universe. No one and nothing can resist his will. When he acts, who can reverse it? This assertion answers the question that everyone who is doubting is asking. Jesus simply tells us that he is able to do whatever needs doing so that we are kept safe into our heavenly home. He is able to be all that we need to live a life of joy and purpose.

No church and no Christian is going to be healthy who does not rest in this bedrock conviction, Jesus rules over all the affairs of my life. There is no suffering that can come to me but by his will. There is no sin in my life that cannot be conquered through his power. There is no act of obedient faith I cannot perform by his grace. He must be trusted for he alone is trustworthy. To trust anyone or anything else is the height of foolishness. Everyone in here is trusting in someone or something. Everyone is believing promises and acting upon those promises. What makes us Christians is that we are trusting the crucified and resurrected Lord of the universe. We believe that to have Christ and to obey Christ is better than possessing the whole universe.

8. Does knowing that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Jesus help you to trust and obey him? Why or why not?

The resurrected Christ calls into existence the new people of God, the church and so every local church trusts and obeys Christ.

9. Verse 19 begins with “therefore”. Why?

The “therefore” points to the motivation for obeying the command of vv. 19-20. We should make disciples of all nations because Jesus is the Lord of heaven and earth. There is no place we can go and no people to whom we can talk over which Jesus is not in charge. We are the ambassadors of the one who is king over every nation and every person. It is his right and every humans duty and delight to acknowledge his lordship. We are to make disciples because he alone is worthy of human loyalty and love. The only rational response to the coming of king Jesus is to have a heart ravished by his love that explodes in worship and labors to increase his glory by helping others to enter into the joy of knowing and obeying him.

10. The central command of vv. 19-20 is “make disciples”. What does Jesus tell us about this command in the rest of the verse? What are some of the things involved in fulfilling this command?

First, this command is to the church corporately. Together, we engage in the work of making disciples. How we each contribute is different, depending on God’s call on our life. This is not a command for every Christian to be a missionary or a pastor. It is not a command for every Christian to do door to door evangelism. Some of you sitting in here God wants to be a missionary or a pastor but most of us he wants for us to contribute to the work of making disciples in all the nations through our faithful living in the jobs and lives he’s given us right now.

Second, every Christian and every church is to be concerned with and involved in the process of making disciples. A Christian that has no concern for seeing others come to know and love Christ is living in disobedience to the Lord they claim as a Savior. A Christian who is not concerned with the fact that there are thousands of people groups in our world that do not yet have a church planted among them, is living in defiance of Christ whom they assert they love. But how we each contribute to that corporate work of making disciples is unique. Each of us has work to do that will contribute to the result that disciples are made among all the people groups of the world. We all have gifts given to us by Christ that we are to use so that we, as a community of worshippers become all that God intends for us to be.

Third, making disciples doesn’t happen by accident. It requires taking the initiative. We must plan for ways to bring the gospel to those who have not heard it and plan for ways to help people become engaged in the process of following Christ. We are under obligation to find all whom God calls us to go to and to make them into disciples.

Fourth, every church is to be involved in making disciples not only in their own community but in the nations of the world.

Fifth, our goal is to turn people into disciples, not just make converts. We are enrolling people in the “school of Christ.” We want people to be involved in a life long process of learning from Jesus so that each person can obey what Jesus tells us.

Sixth, the church determines the process. Christ, through his church, establishes the process by which individuals are made into disciples.

Individuals don't get to decide what it means to be a disciple. Individuals don't make themselves into disciples, they are made into disciples by the work of the church. Jesus taught the apostles and they have passed on what he taught and we are to learn what he taught them. The church is to take those who are enemies of God and through a planned, determined process turn these enemies into lovers of God by making them into disciples or students of Jesus Christ. We are intentionally enrolling people in a curriculum designed to turn people into little Jesus'. Each of us, if we are going to be disciples must submit to the process. We don't get to make up our own process.

Seventh, one of the elements in the process of making disciples is baptism in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. Water baptism in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is something that every person who is a disciple of Jesus submits to and it is part of what every church does as an element in the process of making disciples. Why does Jesus mention baptism first? Baptism is the rite of initiation into the Christian church. It symbolizes and celebrates the work of God in making a sinner into a saint. It pictures the washing away of sin and being raised into a new life by the work of the Holy Spirit. By submitting to baptism, it also illustrates the submission of the individual to Christ. It is the sign that a person is enrolling in the school of Christ for life. It is an individual declaring that by the grace of God I intend to continue to grow as a disciple of Jesus for the rest of my life. The church determines who are candidates for baptism and it is the church who administers the rite of baptism to all those who are ready to enlist in the curriculum to be a disciple of Jesus. It is not simply some religious ritual that mysteriously confers salvation upon people. It is the rite that a person submits to and the church uses to show that a person has begun the process of being a disciple of Jesus. Baptism is not the end, it is the beginning.

Eighth, The church is an educational institution. There are facts to be learned. There are concepts to be mastered. However, all that is learned is also to be obeyed. The truth that is taught results in lives that are changing. What the church is aiming at is a growing number of individuals who have a growing delight in Jesus that results in

growing obedience to Jesus. We know the truth then we love the truth then we obey the truth.

- 11.** Are you engaged in the process of being made into a disciple of Jesus? Why or why not?
- 12.** In what ways are you contributing to our church's goal of making disciples?
- 13.** Why does Jesus add, "and surely I am with you always, even to the very end of the age"?

What makes us the church is the presence of Jesus Christ. We are taken up with him and if he is not present with us, then we are not his church. He is the center of everything. He is who we worship, who we trust, who we talk about and who we obey. It is his presence that enables us to do all this. We want to be near him more than anything or anyone else in the universe. Finally, we are going to nations that have no reason to listen to us but who have every reason to listen to Jesus, the one who rules over them. Therefore if he is with us then we have the right and the authority to make disciples out of anyone and everyone.

The resurrected Christ calls into existence the new people of God, the church and so every local church works to make others into disciples who worship, trust and obey Christ.