

ADDING ON: MAKING ROOM(S) FOR ALL GOD'S PEOPLE MATTHEW 28: 16-20

INTRODUCTION

TRANSITION

Does anyone know what today is? Super Bowl Sunday. Anyone in here a Bronco or Falcon's fan? If you are a fan of either of the teams, what are you going to do today? What are Bronco and Falcon fans doing all over the U.S.? They're throwing parties and inviting all their friends together to watch the game and cheer and if their team wins, they will declare the praise of their team to all who will listen for quite some time. What would you say about me if I said that I'm a Bronco's fan but I don't plan to watch the game? I don't really like the QB, that guy called Brett Farve. Actually, I've not watched any of their games this year. It wouldn't take you long to realize that even though I say I'm a fan of the Broncos, I don't really care about them, I'm not a real fan, I'm just saying I'm one.

It doesn't take much to recognize a real Bronco fan. In the same way, real Christianity is pretty easy to spot. During these five weeks in January, I've been trying to describe what I am persuaded are at least five of the signs of real Christianity in a church. Or, to change the metaphor, these are five of the signs of spiritual health in a congregation. The sermon series has been titled, "Church Improvement, Building a Church that Delights in God and Loves People". I am absolutely persuaded that a church in which any of these five values is absent is a sick church.

The first week I tried to show that a healthy church is a church filled with the very life of Christ, expressed in passionate prayer and devotion to Him. The second week I showed the centrality of God's word transforming hearts and lives. The third week I explained that a healthy church trains its parents to train their children to become faith-filled adults. Last week I set forth the ideal of Christian love as a chief mark of a healthy church. Finally, today I want us to see that if a church or a Christian is truly healthy it or he will be concerned with helping others become followers of Christ. Healthy churches and healthy Christians reproduce themselves.

We are going to examine one of the foundational passages for understanding the purpose and mission of the church. Read with me again Matthew 28: 16-20 on page 706. There are three things this passage tells us about healthy churches. Three things that characterize real Christianity.

I. Healthy churches (and healthy Christians) worship Christ

These verses form the conclusion of Matthew's biography on the life of Jesus. I want you to think with me a little bit about the process of writing a biography on the life of another person. It is not possible to record every event in a person's life. Every biographical author has to take what they perceive to be the significant events and words of a person's life and arrange them in a fashion that tells the story of that person's life.

In the case of the 4 accounts of Jesus' life in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John we have four different authors arranging the deeds and words of Jesus to express truth about his life and mission. They each wrote under the leadership of the Holy Spirit and so all that they tell us is true but they each wrote with a somewhat different aim, trying to emphasize different aspects about Jesus. In giving us 4 biographies on the life of Jesus, God has provided for us a 3-dimensional portrait of our Lord. It's like the difference between listening to your favorite music on a tape deck with one speaker and listening to it through a quadraphonic Bose system. It's the same music, but you don't get the full impact of it from the one speaker that you do from all four.

When you read each of the gospel accounts on the resurrection appearances of Jesus you will find much similarity and yet there are some significant differences in the way that each of them report these events. It's very important as you read them that you pay attention to how each one puts the events together so you can understand what it is that God is trying to say through the emphasis of each of the authors.

So what do we find here in Matthew 28? Mary Magdalene and the "other" Mary go out to see the tomb where Jesus is buried on the morning of the first day of the week, Sunday. They discover the stone is rolled away from the entrance and an angel is sitting on it, the Roman soldiers have passed out from fright. The angel tells the women that Jesus is risen and then in verse 7 tells them to tell Jesus' disciples to go back to Galilee and that they will see Jesus there. The women hurry away, "afraid, yet filled with joy" to tell the disciples when Jesus himself shows up. They fall down and grasp hold of his feet and worship him. In verse 10, Jesus again tells them to tell his "brothers" to go to Galilee for, "there they will see me." Meanwhile, the guards recover from their fainting spell and go tell the religious leaders what has happened. The leaders invent a cover story, "The disciples stole the body", and give the soldiers lots of money so they will join in the cover-up. Then we get to v. 16 and we are given this picture of the 11 disciples meeting Jesus in Galilee and when they see him they worship him, but, Matthew tells us, some of them doubted.

Now, you need to realize that this is the only resurrection appearance of Jesus to the disciples that Matthew reports. Yet we know, from Acts 1, that Jesus appeared to the disciples many times over a period of 40 days. What is Matthew trying to tell us? These are the final actions and words of Jesus in his gospel. How important are final words? When a parent sends their child off to spend the night at a friend's house, what's the last thing they will say? "Be polite. Say thank you. Don't get in trouble. Obey Mr. and Mrs. Smith. Don't go to bed too late." When friends say good-bye for a long period of time they say things like, "I'll miss you. Be sure to stay in touch. It was so good to see you. Thanks for coming." Final words are the words you want to leave ringing in the ears of the hearers. They express what is central and important to the relationship. So these words in Matthew, express what is central to the Christian life.

The eleven disciples stand as representatives of every Christian and of every Christian church. I say this because of the last phrase, "I will be with you always, to the very end of the age." The phrase, "end of the age" is very unique. Only Matthew uses this phrase and on every occasion it refers to the day when Jesus comes back and brings this world to an end. Clearly, while he spoke to the eleven, the "you" he is referring to in this phrase includes every Christian and every church that exists throughout the history of the world.

So, the picture Matthew wants to leave with us is the picture of the church gathered before its Lord. There are two things he wants us to see in vv. 16-17. 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. Don't miss this! Verses 19 & 20 are talked about all the time. There is not a church in the world that does not use these verses as the text justifying their existence and describing their mission. However, if you skip to vv. 19 & 20 and don't see vv. 16-17 you are going to go wrong in your Christian life and experience. You will create a sick kind of Christianity. I know, because I did it, for years. Taking the gospel to the world is not the goal of the Christian life, nor is it the goal of the church. Listen to what John Piper says in his book, "Let the Nations Be Glad!" (p. 11).

"You cannot commend what you do not cherish." Don't miss this. Your first business in life is to find Christ to be the delight of your soul. If you will make it your ambition to find in Jesus all you need to be happy you will find the secret of how to overcome sin, fight off discouragement, overcome doubt, and find courage to tell others about him.

Notice the other thing that Matthew tells us about the church gathered before her Lord. The eleven worshipped but some doubted. The word for doubted is used only one other time in the NT. It is helpful to see it in understanding what Matthew is trying to tell us. Turn to Matthew 14: 31, p. _____. 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 that in the religious leaders and soldiers. 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. What should you do if you find yourself in that condition? 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.

Healthy churches worship Jesus and I might add, provide a safe place for those who are unsure to come seek him.

II. Healthy churches (and healthy Christians) trust Christ

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 Kosovo. He rules over the flight path of comets. 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?

Illustration: Jared arguing with Morgan Farmer about who is the real "Master of the Universe"

He is God. In Matthew 11 Jesus, in praying, says this, "I praise you Father, Lord of heaven and earth." Matthew is declaring the divinity of Jesus. This one who was a man is also God. He alone has authority to forgive sin and pardon sinners.

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.

We're studying the book of Philippians in our Discovery Groups and we have discussed how the church began in the city of Philippi. Paul and Silas went to Philippi through the direct command of God to preach the gospel there. They were doing God's will. In the course of events some individuals in the town became very angry with them, incited a mob and beat Paul and Silas up and then had them thrown in jail. It says in Acts 16 that about midnight they were sitting in the jail, in violation of Roman law, with their wounds open and untended. They had no idea what was going to happen to them. They were sitting there singing hymns of praise to God. How could they do that? Because they were absolutely convinced that all authority in heaven and earth was given to Jesus. No matter what evil men intended, Jesus ruled over and through their evil intent in order to accomplish his will. What we see in Paul's case is that shortly after midnight an earthquake struck that opened the doors of their cells, knocked the chains off all the prisoners but did not destroy the prison building. This event led to the salvation of the jailer and his entire family.

There is no peace, no joy for all who refuse to live in the confidence that the Lord Jesus Christ, sovereignly rules over all the affairs of life. Spiritual health comes to those who trust this mighty Lord to work in and through all of life for the good of his people and the glory of his own name. If Christ is not king, then we have no hope of overcoming evil.

Not only does a healthy church worship Christ and trust Christ but...

III. Healthy churches (and healthy Christians) seek to help others worship and trust Christ

V. 19 begins with “Therefore”. What is it there for? Because only Jesus has the authority to pardon sinners, because he alone rules over all the forces of evil, because he is earth’s only king and the only one worthy of worship, because his greatness is seen in the glad submission of more and more people, go and make disciples. Don’t miss the motivation for making disciples. The Bible does not seek to motivate us to the task of making disciples in all the nations by emphasizing the horror of hell and the lostness of humanity. The bible does not seek to motivate us by exalting the worth of man but by exalting the worth of God. As we see here, 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.

There are 5 things you need to see about this command from king Jesus:

1. CORPORATE: It is important to see that 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. 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. 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. But how we each contribute to that corporate work of making disciples is unique.

2. INITIATIVE: 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. As I have said before, parents, no matter what else God calls you to, he has given you a very specific group that you are to make disciples of. There are people in Janesville that God intends for us, as a church, to enlist as followers of Christ. We are under obligation to find all whom God calls us to go to and to make them into disciples. That’s why we’re doing the Valentine banquet. However, we are not to be concerned with only Janesville. We are to look at the whole world. God wants us to have a part in making disciples in other nations. Explain what a nation is. Share Piper’s story of two ocean liners.

3. PROCESS: Making people into disciples is engaging them in a process. We need to see our work as not simply sharing some facts and trying to get people to make a decision. Rather, we are aiming at bringing people to a person, introducing them to him and helping them follow him. There is no distinction in the Bible between evangelism and discipleship. There is one process, all of us are at various stages in that process, but we’re all in the same one. We are all learners of Jesus.

4. RESPONSE: We are not to be satisfied with simply teaching truth about Jesus, we are working for a response. We are to be passionately seeking to persuade people to respond to Jesus. The task of the church is not merely dispensing information. We really are aiming at seeing people’s lives changed. I’m not just talking about seeing people who don’t know Jesus at all being converted to him but seeing all of us continuing to grow in our salvation. A church that is satisfied with simply adding numbers of people who have “accepted Jesus” is not aiming at the correct objective. The apostle Paul said to the leaders of the church in Ephesus, “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God...Remember, that for 3 years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears” A Christian or a church that is indifferent to whether people are progressing in faith is a sick Christian or church.

5. INCORPORATION

6. INSTRUCTION

Illustration: Contrast my response to being invited to do evangelism when in High School and when being invited to help reach campus for Christ by Jesse.

There is no greater joy in life than to be involved with a group of people, a church, who are growing in their delight in God and in the process of helping others come to know and love and worship Him. It is my great passion for us

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

BENEDICTION

Psalm 67: 1-2

NATIONS DISCIPLE WORSHIP TEACH BAPTIZE

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