

SERMON TEXT: Matthew 28:16–20

SERMON TITLE: Christ's Sign on Christ's Church of Christ's Power and Christ's Faithfulness

Main idea: The Lord Jesus builds His church using disciples who are authorized by Him, in dependence upon His power and His faithfulness, to make more disciples who are dependent upon His power and His faithfulness.

¹⁶ Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them. ¹⁷ When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted.

¹⁸ And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

Introduction

The unimpressive church: "eleven disciples"—a church that includes unbelievers, tares, reprobate. "Some doubted"—even among the believers in the church, we find ourselves constantly weak and struggling. This is the Lord's ordinary plan for the church (1Corinthians 1:18–31). And this is the context of the great commission: not great disciples making more of them, but dependent disciples making more dependent disciples. [Main idea: The Lord Jesus builds His church using disciples who are authorized by Him, in dependence upon His power and His faithfulness, to make more disciples who are dependent upon His power and His faithfulness.]

1. Christ's authority, power, and faithfulness

- a. Christ's authority. "I will build My Church" (cf. 16:18). And yet, He has been telling them now that He is ascending to heaven. *How* will He build His church? Through men like the one to whom He would say just five verses later, "Get behind Me, Satan"! This is Christ's prerogative on earth, to choose whom He wills to save; and to choose whom He wills to use.
- b. Christ's power. With the identifying of disciples ("followers"), we expect a baptism. From John 3:26 and 4:1–2, we know that baptisms were a way of identifying disciples of various kinds/groups. John's baptism had been a baptism of needing repentance. But he had said that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire—that is, a baptism that declares that Christ enables repentance. Christ has authority on earth to call whom He wills, and He has authority in heaven to pour out His Holy Spirit upon whom He wills. The sign that He gives displays this pouring out of His Spirit, who works by His almighty power in His disciples. [n.b. there are many other places to talk about mode, but this should be enough by itself to vindicate pouring/affusion]
- c. Christ's faithfulness. "And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Christ in us is the hope of glory (Col 1:27). We lose everything to gain Christ, so that we might be found in Him, having no righteousness or power of our own (Phil 3:7–11). All of our salvation—election, calling, justification, adoption, sanctification, glorification; all of it!—comes by union with Christ. We are called to be faithful, but it is HIS faithfulness upon which we depend, not our own.

2. Christ's identity

- a. God the Son who became Man. "All authority has been given to Me." There are things that Christ learned in His humanity, such as obedience by suffering (Heb 5:5–8). And there are things that Christ earned in His humanity, such as the right to give salvation to all who belong to Him (Heb 5:9–10), and the name that is above every other name (Phil 2:5–11). Christ has earned, even with respect to His human nature and His finished work as the Mediator, all authority in heaven and on earth.
- b. God the Son who is still—always has been, and always will be—God. When we are baptized into Christ, when we are set apart with the disciples of Christ, we are baptized into His Name. What is that Name? "the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." One Name; one God. And yet this one Name identifies this one God as being in three Persons. The Lord Jesus Christ is the ultimate revelation to us of the Triune God, and He gives here as His Name, "the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit."

3. Our identity

- a. Those whom He has added to His church. There are no independent-agent or "franchise" Christians. They are all "corporate." Anyone who believes is to be added to the number and marked off (cf. Ac 2:41; 4:4).
- b. Those who are added by household, which we see through the rest of the New Testament (Ac 4:4 "men," Ac 10 Cornelius, Ac 16 Lydia, Ac 16 the Jailer, Ac 18 Crispus, 1Cor 1 Stephanus, cf. 1Cor 7 the "holy" husband and child). It is an irregular situation, which cries out for special grace, when there are one or few in the household who are believers. When a baby is born, a disciple has been added.
- c. Those who submit to Christ's signs. Baptism is a declaration by Jesus. A declaration to the congregation of the things that we see in this passage, every time it is applied to a newly added disciple. Our baptisms demand as a response, just as the gospel demands a response. Your baptism demands:
 - i. That you trust in Christ's power and Christ's faithfulness. Does baptism save you? Yes, if you believe in the Christ who marks you off! It is a sign and seal *unto faith*. Pray that the Holy Spirit would use your baptism as a means of awakening faith in you and strengthening you in that faith. And respond to it by trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ! For, I warn you that if your baptism is not a means of grace unto you, then it shall testify against you that you are an apostate.
 - ii. That you obey all that Christ has commanded. This is why the apostles must teach all that Christ has commanded, and that they are guilty of the blood of the church if they do not (v20a, cf. Ac 20:20, 26–28).

Conclusion

Of those things that Christ has commanded as the "parts of the ordinary religious worship of God," baptism is the one that takes the most effort on our part to recognize as something that He has commanded to be done in the holy assembly on the Lord's Day. And yet, when we come to a correct understanding of what baptism is, the fact that it is a sacrament—and therefore a part of the ordinary religious worship of God—becomes clear.

For, baptism is not, as so many have mistakenly thought or learned, a statement by the new disciple. It is a mark that is given by the Lord of the disciples, as His own statement. This is why it is the eleven that He has set apart as teachers whom He calls here to be baptizers. And those whom He calls to the office of apostle, or prophet, or evangelist, or pastor-teacher. These, He has commanded to baptize those whom He adds to His church. These, He has commanded to teach those whom He adds to His church.

In baptism, then, what are we to see? Just what we have discovered when we asked this question of every other action that the Lord has commanded for the holy worship assembly on the Lord's Day: we are to see the Lord Himself! The Lord Jesus builds His church using disciples who are authorized by Him, in dependence upon His power and His faithfulness, to make more disciples who are dependent upon His power and His faithfulness.