

Sermons on Matthew

The Great Commission

Part Five
Baptizing Them
Matthew 28:18-20

With Study Questions

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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. (Matthew 28:18-20)**

Introduction

The 49th chapter of Genesis records Jacob’s last words to his sons. These words reminded them of things that were done and foretold things that would be done. 1 Kings 2 gives the account of the death of King David and his instructions to his son, Solomon. He charges Solomon to **“prove yourself a man. And keep charge of the Lord your God: to walk in His way, to keep His statutes, His commandments, His judgments and His testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses”** (1 Kings 2:2-3). These were important words David gave at the end of his earthly life.

When the children of Israel repented of following the false gods of the **“Baal and Ashtoreths, and served the Lord only”** (1 Samuel 7:4), God delivered them from the hands of the Philistines. **“Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen, and called its name Ebenezer** (literally ‘Stone of Help’), **saying, Thus far the Lord has helped us.”** (1 Samuel 7:12—parenthesis mine). It was a common practice to set up stones or pillars as a reminder of some wonderful event that had taken place (Genesis 28:18, 19; 31:45-52; 35:14; Joshua 4:9).

When God made a promise to Abraham to **“multiply him exceedingly”** (Genesis 17:2), a covenant where his descendants would be a blessing to all the families of the earth (Genesis 12:3)—a promise that would be fulfilled in Christ in the message that **“God justify the Gentiles by faith”** (Galatians 3:8), that covenant would be ratified through a sign and a seal known as circumcision (Genesis 17:10; Romans 4:11).

It was determined wise not to destroy all of the concentration camps utilized by the Nazis to exterminate Jews during World War II that what took place might not be forgotten. After 9/11, numerous reminders were set up by the government and private organizations and families with the simple message of remembrance.

It is so easy to forget. God has, therefore, made provision for our propensity to forget. In the Old Covenant He did this via rock pillars, circumcision, various annual feasts and festivals (such as Passover), the priestly sacrifices and so on.

In the New Covenant God makes provision for our propensity to forget by establishing the New Covenant sacraments. When Jesus knew His earthly ministry was coming to an end **“on the night in which He was betrayed” (1 Corinthians 11:23)**, Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper. And here, at the very end of the gospel (similar to King David’s final words to his son, similar to the rock pillars of remembrance, similar to the Old Covenant sacrificial system, festivals and circumcision), Jesus instructs His followers to in a physical activity which would accompany the message of the gospel. They were to baptize those who had been made disciples and they were to engage in the Lord’s Supper until Christ’s return (1 Corinthians 11:26). These are the two sacraments of the New Covenant. A quick review:

All Authority

The Great Commission begins with a preamble. Before Jesus gives the church its mission, He declares the success of His own mission. **“All authority”** was given to Him. This was not something He received for free. Jesus paid the price to purchase that which had been usurped by sin and Satan. Jesus paid the price and now commissions His church to go and, if you will, pick up the goods for which He paid—this includes all things.

Go

The **“Go”** in the Great Commission is all encompassing. Wherever you find yourself, your surroundings belong to God. As I have earlier pointed out, you needn’t get on a boat or plane or a bus. We live in a world that is owned by God (Psalm 24:1). This is something men are to be reminded of, wherever.

Make Disciples

The one command in the Great Commission is to “**make disciples.**” First and foremost, disciples are made by the grace of God through the preaching of the gospel (Acts 14:21; Mark 16:15; Romans 1:16; 1 Corinthians 1:21; Romans 10:14-17, etc.) The job of the church, individually and collectively, above all things, is to be Christ’s herald of good news. Our greatest enemy, the devil and his death, has been defeated. The means by which God applies this accomplishment to the hearts of men is by His Spirit through preaching of God’s word.

All The Nations

The commission to make disciples extends to all the nations. Again, the word Jesus uses is *ethne* from which we get our word ethnic. In the past reaching out to various ethnicities would require travel across borders. This is simply no longer the case. The entire world is to hear the gospel. We will have three more observations in the Great Commission: Baptism, teaching all Christ commanded, and the recognition of His presence with us always. This morning we briefly discuss baptism.

Baptizing Them

The Word ‘Baptism’

There is a great deal of significance associated with the word used by Jesus when it comes to baptism. The word is *baptizontes* or baptizing. One of the first movements after the Reformation seized (or was given) the name (Anabaptists) and an entire denomination is named after the sacrament with a commitment to what might appear to be a literal understanding of what it means, which is “to immerse”. I fear this has become a bit of a red herring where we lose the depth of the word.

First, to immerse is not the same as to submerge (which is often how it is suggested). There is no problem with submerging (I was submerged three times in one baptism) but I’m hoping we can move past that emphasis. Baptism means so much more.

The Greek verb does not necessarily mean to submerge. For example, in the Greek translation of the Old Testament in Daniel 4:33 (LXX. Daniel 4:30) Nebuchadnezzar is said to have been baptized with the dew of heaven. In the New Testament the verb for baptize and another verb for washing are interchangeable. For example, Luke 11:38 uses baptize for washing the

hands before meals, while Matthew 15:2, 20 and Mark 7:30 use the other verb *nipontai* for the same thing.¹ We also read that “**all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea**” (1 Corinthians 10:2), meaning they were now associated with deliverance rather than slavery.

My initial point is that all the discussion regarding the proper mode of baptism (many Baptist churches will require one to be baptized again if they are not submerged) misdirects us in terms of its beauty and value. Certainly submersion gives a picture of dying and being buried with Christ (Romans 6:3), but pouring or sprinkling is more frequently expressed in terms of what baptism signifies, e.g.

I will pour My Spirit on your descendants, and My blessing on your offspring (Isaiah 44:3).

He saved us, through __the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, ⁻⁶⁻ __whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior (Titus 3:5, 6).

_Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean (Ezekiel 36:25).

_So shall He _sprinkle many nations (Isaiah 52:15). which seems a prophecy of this commission to *baptize the nations*.²

Arguments over the mode, as far as I am concerned, are secondary and can misdirect us, although I do believe water is necessary.

What is a Sacrament?

A Priority Keeper

We’ve already established that God uses things with physical properties (wine, bread and water) to convey spiritual realities in order to help us in our propensity to forget. We do the Lord’s Supper weekly. If I

¹Gordon Clark, *What Do Presbyterians Believe?* (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1956), p. 242.

²Henry, M. (1996, c1991). *Matthew Henry’s commentary on the whole Bible : Complete and unabridged in one volume* (Mt 28:16). Peabody: Hendrickson.

were to preach a sermon with no gospel, some of you might catch it. If we failed to have the Lord's Supper, everyone would notice. The sacraments (along with the preached word—it is always word and sacrament in order to understand what the sacrament means) keep the priorities of the church in order. The message conveyed in the sacraments is to ever be front and center in the church. If there are continual non sequiturs between the sermon and the sacraments there is a problem. So what is a sacrament?

Signs and Seals

Baptism is a sign and a seal of a covenant promise God has made to a people. A sign points to something other than itself. A seal is an endorsement. When a king desires to sanction a document, perhaps a scroll, he has wax melted on its edges to seal it. He will then take his signet ring or similar emblem-making device and push it against the soft wax to demonstrate it has his approval or seal. Similar to worldly kings, the King of kings places His seal upon those He has sanctioned or separated for Himself (Romans 4:11).

Whose Sign is It?

We will often view the sacrament as a sign of something we have done. People will explain that their baptism is a sign of their faith in Christ. People who were baptized as infants, then re-baptized as adults may explain "I wanted to be baptized based upon my faith, not my parents." And there is certainly some truth to that. But we must be careful to avoid thinking the primary purpose of the sacrament is the testimony of man. Baptism is not man's sign, it's God's sign. The important sign in baptism is not that I have faith but that there is a God who saves by faith.

Memorial or Magic?

Though baptism and the Lord's Supper should not be viewed as mere memorials (the Scriptures do seem to indicate a special presence of the Spirit of Christ in them—perhaps the way many people would understand the special presence of the Spirit in the words during evangelism) they should not be viewed as magic. If faith is not added to the sacrament (either before or after—Romans 4:11) it can be a source of judgment as easily as blessing (1 Corinthians 11:30).

Baptism is a sign and seal of a few things: The covenant of grace (Colossians 2:11, 12); ingrafting into Christ (Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3-5); rebirth (Titus 3:5); remission of sins (Acts 2:38); and the duty of new obedience (Romans 6:4). We will pursue these things in our next meeting.

Questions for Study

1. What are some examples in the Old Testament of God helping people remember what He did? Can you think of things we do today to help us remember (pages 2, 3)?
2. Review the Great Commission: All Authority; Go; Make Disciples; All the Nations (pages 3, 4)?
3. What does the word "baptize" mean? Does this mean people must be submerged? What significance would submersion have? Sprinkling? Pouring? Discuss (pages 4, 5).

4. What are the sacraments in the New Covenant (page 3)?
5. How do the sacraments help the church keep its priorities (page 6)?
6. Define a sacrament? What is a sign? A seal? (page 6)?
7. Whose sign is it? Explain (pages 6, 7).
8. Are the sacraments magic? What must accompany the sacraments (page 7)?