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✦ Discipleship and the Great Commission

It is mission Sunday, and as one walks into the church and glances at the bulletin, the decision is nearly made to turn right around and bolt. The guest speaker is going to speak on Matthew 28:16–20, again! How many times do we need to hear about the Great Commission? What more can be said? And while many missionary speakers have progressed from demanding that everyone should “go” and have begun to remind us that some of us need to stay in order to pray and pay, and OMF and other organizations have started to speak of “six ways to reach God’s world,”¹ we may feel that it’s just the same old same old. Somebody is trying to motivate us to get involved in mission. And they often do it in a way that is enough to make even a veteran missionary feel guilty that they went to the wrong people group or country. Enough is enough. A moratorium should be placed on preaching about the Great Commission. Or should it?

While Matthew 28 frequently provides the text for mission sermons, there was a time when this was not so. In fact, throughout most of church history the text did not function as an apologetic for mission involvement. The Reformers certainly didn’t use it that way, as they inherited the idea that the Great Commission was given to and fulfilled by Jesus’ apostles when they took to the gospel to the world of their time.² Not until William Carey wrote *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians, to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens* did anyone attempt to demonstrate that Jesus’ command to the apostles was still in effect and should still be obeyed.³ But even Carey neglected to point out that the church’s participation in the *missio Dei* should not

be built upon a small group of verses.⁴ Even the recognition that a version of the Great Commission can be found in each of the Gospels and Acts (Mark 16:14–18; Luke 24:44–49; John 20:19–23; Acts 1:4–8), isn’t enough to support a full-orbed mission theology.⁵ That can only spring from broad scriptural support. And my aim in this paper is nowhere near that adventurous.

In what follows, we will examine Matthew 28:16–20 to see what it adds to our theology of mission. And even though it provides only one building block from which that theology will be constructed, it is a foundation stone that provides support for the others together and gives them strength. As the text wasn’t designed to foster guilt, I won’t go there. And I promise that I will try not to give just another humdrum recitation of the passage. I will, however, make use of what I generally believe to be a dreadful method of biblical exposition. The paper will follow the old preacher’s trick of structuring an outline around a series of Cs.⁶ We will see how the *context* of the passage in Matthew’s Gospel helps us come to grips with why the author concentrated on Christ’s *claim*, Christ’s *command*, and Christ’s words of *comfort*.

The context of the Great Commission

One of the fundamental principles of biblical hermeneutics is to interpret a text in its context. Matthew’s record of Jesus’ last command is not some random jotting of an event that took place in Galilee in the first century, but his concluding words in the book he wrote to show that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah who had been promised from the beginning of time. Matthew begins the book with the words,

“A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham” (Matt 1:1). He then shows that the birth of this baby who had at least four questionable women in his ancestry qualifies to be called the Messiah.⁷ In Matthew 2, the child who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and given the name Immanuel is worshipped by the Magi as the newborn King of the Jews. In chapter 3, Jesus is baptized by John, and recognized as the Son of God when the Holy Spirit came down upon him in the form of a dove. In chapter 4, Satan tempts Jesus by trying to get him to prove that he was the Son of God by performing miraculous feats for personal benefit. He also promises to give him the whole world in exchange for worship. As we will see below, this temptation is put into right perspective in Matthew 28. After overcoming Satan, Jesus begins his earthly ministry and picks some of the men whom he will train to carry on his ministry after him.

That is the beginning of Matthew’s Gospel. From chapter 4 until the middle of chapter 26 Matthew develops Jesus’ earthly ministry with its special focus on his proclamation of the Kingdom of Heaven, all the while preparing to tell of his death which takes place in chapter 27. In the story that Matthew tells, Jesus is the Messiah, but not the one the Jews had wanted to free them from Roman oppression. To the contrary, he is killed by the Romans at the instigation of the Jewish rulers. The story does not, however, end with Jesus’ death.

Matthew 28 begins with Mary Magdalene and another Mary rising early to visit Jesus’ grave. Mark’s and Luke’s Gospels explain that they went to anoint Jesus’ body with spices and thus prepare it for burial. Matthew does not seem to be interested in why they went, but rather in what happened when they got to the tomb. There they saw an angel sitting on the stone that had once sealed the entrance. When the angel informed them that Jesus had risen from the dead, their hearts were filled with a mixture of fear and joy. How could this happen? In amazement, they ran off to tell the disciples what they had seen and on their way bumped

into Jesus. Hearing his greeting, “They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him” (Matt 28:9). Worship is, after all, the correct response when one meets the resurrected Christ. But their worship did not remove their fear, so Jesus comforted them by adding, “Do not be afraid,” and instructed them to “Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me” (Matt 28:10). The women clearly obeyed Jesus’ instruction, for in v 16 we find the disciples on the mountain in Galilee where Jesus had told them to go.⁸ And when they saw him, they responded in the same way as the women: they worshipped him.

This overview of Matthew reveals the context in which Jesus gave his disciples the Great Commission. He was the King. He was worshipped as king when he was a baby. He came to lead people into the Kingdom of Heaven. He was crucified as King of the Jews (Matt 27:37, 42). He rose as King over death and was worshipped by the women and his disciples who recognized him as such. The Great Commission is closely bound to the ministry of Jesus and to his resurrection and the worship of those who saw him and believed in him. The command to make disciples is thus given to people who recognize who Jesus is and worship him as Lord and King.

Christ’s claim

Jesus’ sovereign rule is an essential part of the discipleship process. Disciples can only be made because of who he is and what he has said should be done. Notice the stupendous claim he makes for himself in Matt 28:18. “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” To have “all authority” implies sovereignty over everything. Jesus claims sovereignty over heaven. Jesus claims sovereignty over the earth. And though the text doesn’t explain it at this point, the Bible declares that his sovereignty can be seen in two ways. First, he is the ruler of the physical world. As the eternal creator God, he made everything and keeps everything going. Were it not for his creative power the universe would fall apart.

Second, he is sovereign over the spiritual world. Though the Magi worshipped him as “King of the Jews” (Matt 2:1–2) and he entered Jerusalem as the King “riding on a donkey”—a form of travel Zechariah prophesied would be used by the Jew’s king (Matt 21:5; Zech 9:9)—in his discussions with Pilate Jesus admitted being the King of the Jews (Matt 27:11) and is even identified as such on the cross (Matt 27:37), yet in John’s Gospel insists, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36). While Jesus came to the earth to be King, he did not set up his throne in a backward corner of the Roman Empire. Rather, he came to set up a universal spiritual kingdom in human hearts. The authority claimed by Jesus is therefore a fulfillment of Dan 7:13–14 where we read that “one like a son of man” approached the Ancient of Days and “was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.”⁹

As Jesus’ claim to all authority extends to the whole of creation, it demolishes Satan’s assertion that he could give the world to Jesus in exchange for worship. Jesus receives authority, not over just the world but everything, because the Father, not Satan, has the right to give it. So, while the Bible portrays Satan as “the prince of this world”, “the god of this age”, and “the ruler of the kingdom of the air” (John 12:31; 2 Cor 4:4; Eph 2:2), he is only a prince—a ruler with limited authority—and not the real king of the cosmos. God allows Satan to control part of the world for a limited time, but the real power, the real authority is Christ. And while Satan is a dangerous enemy, he received a serious setback in the wilderness and was overwhelmed at the cross. So, even though he may be on a long leash, he remains bound. Satan is only, as Luther understood it, “God’s devil”. As in the book of Job so in the rest of history, God sets limits on what Satan can do and will not permit him to do more than that.

So Christ’s claim to all authority is the foundation upon which the Great

Commission stands. For the disciples to be able to make disciples in Jesus' name, they needed to know that he was alive, that all authority had been given to him, and that he gave them the command and the power to do what he wanted. Had they not recognized Christ's authority, they would never have gone out and "turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6, ESV). Only a short time before they met Jesus on the mountain, the apostles were a most enfeebled and downcast lot. Everything they had pinned their hopes upon had been nailed to the cross and brutally destroyed. Could men in this state invent the resurrection? And even if they could concoct such a story, is it conceivable that they could have preached it with conviction? Only the authority of the resurrected Christ could give them the power they needed to venture out as apostles ("sent ones") and tell others about the man who had been killed but who came back to life to give everyone the hope of having a right relationship with God. Only the authority of the living Christ could ensure that the Great Commission would be fulfilled.

really all about. How does "go" fit in then? It, along with "baptizing" and "preaching", is a participle that is used to indicate *how* the disciples are to make disciples. They are to make disciples by going, baptizing, and teaching. We will address these below, but will first address the issue of what it means to be a disciple. For unless we know what a disciple is, we will never be able to make them.

The Gospel of Matthew is very clear that being a disciple of Jesus is different from being a disciple of Moses or of John the Baptist or of anyone else. While it maintains the relationship of a student to a teacher, it goes much deeper.¹⁰ This is radical discipleship in the sense that John Stott uses the term in his book, *The Radical Disciple*—it affects a person down to the roots and results in a thoroughgoing commitment to the one who is followed.¹¹ Being a disciple of Jesus means that one must relinquish all conflicting ties and allegiances and become wholly committed to him (Matt 4:22; 8:21–23; 10:37; 12:46–50). It means living out the paradox that

17:20), hold too high a regard for their own abilities (Matt 26:35) and continually misunderstand who Jesus is. This is why they need to hear that all authority has been given to Jesus before he tells them to go and make disciples. Without their teacher and Lord's presence and direction they could never make disciples. In fact, they need him to continue building them up as disciples and to work through them so that other disciples can be made.

Since Christ's final order was to make disciples, the Great Commission cannot be completed (in its fullest sense) until the job of making disciples is done. How then do we do it? Just how do we make disciples? Before we can make disciples, we must be disciples. Notice that Jesus is speaking to his disciples in the text. His command is for disciples to make disciples. As Köstenberger and O'Brien say, "successful disciple-making ... presupposes the committed discipleship of the disciple-makers themselves."¹² No one else can do it. Here is where I expect some of my readers to cry out, "But I have never been discipled, how can I disciple someone else." I can only respond by saying that being discipled and being *formally* discipled in a one-to-one relationship with a mentor or being led through a ten-lesson program is not the same thing. We have already seen some of what the Bible considers to exemplify the life of discipleship. Jesus gives us some more in his final earthly statements. If we want to know whether we have been discipled and how to disciple others, we would best listen to him.

Jesus sets out three elements that are inextricably bound with discipleship and all expressed by Greek aorist participles: going, baptizing, and teaching. One can hardly think of discipleship taking place without someone "going" to find those who need to be discipled and doing it. This has led some to conclude that the word translated "go" or "going" is a "participle of attendant circumstances" that indicates Jesus simply assumed that his disciples would "go" in order to make disciples.¹³ The phrase

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Christ's command

But Christ did have authority. He had *all* authority. So he had the right to send out his disciples to serve as his ambassadors. We have noted that the classic mission talk on the Great Commission focuses on the word "go". This is because our English translations all say something like, "go (or "go ye") and make disciples of all nations," and "go" is used in English as a command. The problem is that, as important as "go" is in the Commission, it is neither the main verb in this sentence, nor the most important thought. In Greek, the main verb is *mathēteusanta*, an aorist active imperative translated "make disciples". It is this imperative, this command, that lets us know what the Great Commission is

dying to this world through carrying one's cross is the way to life (Matt 10:38–39; 16:24–26). It means caring for little children in their need (Matt 10:42) and sharing what Jesus has multiplied with others (Matt 14:16, 19; 15:36). Being a disciple also means that one will receive power, authority, *exousia*, to drive out spirits and heal, and to make disciples (Matt 10:1; 28:19). And most of all, it means living out the kind of righteous life that Jesus modeled and taught about during his earthly ministry.

Disciples are not, however, perfect. While they follow Jesus, learn from Jesus, and do what he teaches them to do, they also express fear (Matt 8:26; 14:26) and doubt (Matt 14:31; 28:16), become indignant (Matt 20:24; 26:8), lack faith (Matt 8:26;

would thus be translated something like, “Therefore, as you go, make disciples.” While this is possible, it seems more correct to allow the participle to take the force of the main verb upon which it is dependent and translate it as an imperative.¹⁴ In other words, Jesus’ disciples *are* commanded to go. But simply “going” isn’t enough. The Great Commission requires that we go and *make disciples*. The following two participles give us keen insight into what this should look like.

According to Jesus, baptism is an indispensable element in discipleship. Its place in his explanation of how to make disciples gives us reason to consider it the first step in discipleship.¹⁵ As they were familiar with the baptism of John, the disciples would naturally have understood Jesus to refer to a baptism of repentance that brought people into a right relationship with God. This can be seen in the response to Peter’s Pentecostal sermon preached not many days later. When the people asked what they should do, Peter commanded them to “Repent and be baptized” (Acts 2:38). Baptism is a biblical requirement for repentant, regenerate, people. From the time of Augustine, if not before, baptism was understood to be an outward and visible sign of an internal and spiritual grace conferred by Christ. It was a public and physical reenactment of what Jesus had done personally and spiritually.

When Jesus taught his disciples to make disciples by baptizing, he added two new concepts that added to their understanding that baptism was a sign of repentance. The first is that baptism is not to be reserved for the Jews of Jerusalem and Judea, but extended to the whole world—“all the nations” should become his disciples and be baptized. The extent of *panta ta ethnē* has been widely discussed. Since the term is regularly used in the Bible (particularly the Septuagint) to refer to Gentiles as distinct from Jews, some commentators have seen here an explanation for the Matthean community to begin their mission to the Gentiles and end

outreach to Jews. This interpretation surely fails due to Jesus’ command at the beginning of Acts that his disciples should “be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8) and the fact that the apostles continued to preach to both Jews and Gentiles wherever they went.

The phrase took on a whole new life after Ralph Winter’s address at the 1974 Lausanne International Congress on World Evangelization where he began addressing *panta ta ethnē*, not in terms of countries but of peoples, and spawned the concept of people groups.¹⁶ But while it has become a popular means for mobilizing missionaries to go reach and others to adopt and pray for unreached people groups, it is not possible to define *panta ta ethnē* in such pointed terms. As one of four main words used for people in the New Testament, *ethnos* “is the most general and therefore the weakest of these terms.”¹⁷ As stated above, it is generally used in the Bible for the Hebrew *goyim*, the Gentiles, that is non-Jews.¹⁸ To define it in very explicit terms goes against general use. To define it as narrowly as happens in some discussions of people groups would make it incomprehensible to the original disciples. In the context it seems best to take *panta ta ethnē* as referring to all Gentiles and Jews. In other words, the Great Commission extends to everyone. Everyone should be disciplined.

The second idea that Jesus added to the disciples’ understanding of baptism is that new disciples were to be baptized into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.¹⁹ This Trinitarian formula found in the context of baptism reminds us that the Father and Spirit were present at Jesus’ baptism and that those who are baptized should know that allegiance to and “experience of God in these three Persons is the essential basis of discipleship.”²⁰ That disciples are baptized “into” God’s name indicates that they belong to him as his personal possession.

Jesus’ command to make disciples by baptizing them gives us reason to insist that all new believers be baptized. This does not imply that there is anything magical about the rite of baptism that makes one a real believer or a better believer. Such thinking reflects pagan superstition and must be rejected. However, as a disciple is to learn and obey Jesus’ commands (Matt 28:20; John 14:15), their discipleship should be marked by baptism as it signifies that they have become members of the people of God. Baptism is therefore a kind of an initiation ceremony through which new believers enter into fellowship with all of Christ’s disciples. Through baptism they acknowledge that they are part of the Christian community and are recognized by that community as true members. We should therefore encourage every new believer to be baptized.

But baptizing new believers is only one part of making disciples and once it is over it should never be repeated. The next step is to teach them to observe all that Jesus commanded. The extent of this command isn’t immediately clear. Does it refer to the things Jesus taught during his earthly ministry? Undoubtedly so. Could it possibly refer to something more than that, say like the whole of the Bible? Since the Holy Spirit who inspired Scripture is the Spirit of Jesus Christ (Phil 1:9), this is extremely possible. We know for sure that the early disciples continually demonstrated how the Old Testament Scriptures pointed to the coming of Jesus. We also know that Paul told the Ephesian elders that he “did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27, ESV). Everything needed to be taught. Everything needed to be understood. Everything needed to be obeyed.

A friend has said that he feels that if the two words “to obey” (NIV) or “to observe” (ESV) were removed from the Great Commission, most people would not realize anything was missing. But Jesus is not so much concerned that people come to understand some facts about him, or even learn what he said, but

that they obey, observe, all that he commanded. Jesus did not come merely to be the Savior who would forgive sins and make everything right. Jesus came to be the Lord who would be obeyed. Any disciple of Christ must accept him as Savior and Lord. It is impossible that he could be one without being the other.

The disciples were to make disciples because Jesus has all authority. They were to make disciples by going, baptizing, and teaching. In a sense we can say that they were to make disciples who would make disciples who would make disciples in a ceaseless chain until he returns. And even though the messengers may have been weak (and still are), it is important to understand that with respect to the gospel, the condition of the messenger does not change the validity of the message. The disciples might fail, but “not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen” of God’s law would fail (Matt 5:18).

Just as Jesus’ authority required that they [his disciples] obey his command to make disciples, his presence comforted them so they would be willing to go anywhere to baptize new believers and to teach them everything they needed to know and do to live as members of God’s kingdom.

It is the gospel which is the power of God unto salvation, not the preacher (Rom 1:16). This does not mean that the preachers of the gospel are not important or that their lives and actions don’t matter. It simply affirms that the one who possesses all power will use his finite and fallen people to make disciples for himself when his word is faithfully proclaimed and to help them grow in grace.

While the disciples are required to go and make disciples, their success is not dependent upon themselves, but upon the one who has all authority, the one who also promised to be with them forever, “to the very end of the age” (Matt 28:20). This grounds bring disciples surety that people will turn to God and believe. Even so, success should not be measured by counting heads. Jesus instructed his disciples to make disciples, not

converts. Success should only be calculated according the measure that we have been faithful to the One who called us and commanded us to go and do his work. As Paul later wrote, some plant, and some water, but God causes all the growth (1 Cor 3:6). We do not need to count how many people we have led to the Lord. We need to obey his command, and trust him for great results.

Christ’s comfort

We have thus far seen that the Great Commission is based on Jesus’ claim to have all authority which he expresses by giving his disciples a new command. In this final section, we want to see that he comforts them when they are very needy. Just a few weeks earlier the disciples had stood by while Jesus was arrested, tried, and crucified. As a result, they all fled, not knowing what to do with themselves. And when they heard that he had come back from the dead, they could hardly believe

it. How could a dead man be alive again? That’s why their first sight of the risen Lord filled them with an incredible mixture of fear and joy.

And instead of laying a guilt trip on them for not being more faithful, Luke and John recall that Jesus greeted them by saying, “Peace be with you,” when he met his disciples in the upper room (Luke 24:36; John 20:19, 21, 26). Though Matthew (along with Mark) omits any reference to the Jerusalem appearances, he records other words of comfort spoken by Jesus in Galilee. “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matt 28:20). We should not read these words too hastily as they unify Jesus’ earthly and heavenly ministries. At the beginning of Matthew’s Gospel, the angel informed Joseph that Mary would

give birth to a boy conceived by the Holy Spirit and that he should give him the name Jesus. The Evangelist then recounts that this fulfilled Isaiah’s prophecy that a “virgin will be with child ... and they will call him Immanuel”—which means, ‘God with us’” (Matt 1:20–23). In Matthew 28, the one who would be called Immanuel was promising to be with them forever. What could be more comforting than that?

Just as Jesus’ authority required that they obey his command to make disciples, his presence comforted them so they would be willing to go anywhere to baptize new believers and to teach them everything they needed to know and do to live as members of God’s kingdom. But not long after Jesus said he would be with them forever, a very strange thing happened. He was taken up into heaven and the disciples never saw him again on this earth. How could he say that he would always be with them and then disappear into the clouds? Though Matthew felt no compulsion to comment, John’s Gospel informs us that on the night of the Last Supper Jesus told his disciples that he would ask the Father to send *allos paraklēton*, “another Counselor” or Comforter to be with them (John 14:16–27).²¹ The Greek word, *allos*, carries the idea of another of the same kind. Thus when Jesus spoke of “another Counselor”, he meant one who was of the same kind as himself. “The implication ... is that Jesus has performed the role of a Paraclete during his earthly ministry, and after his departure he will ask the Father to send another Paraclete to perform a like ministry for his disciples.”²² As Jesus explained on the night of his betrayal, his departure was essential. While Jesus was on earth in his physical body he could only be at one place at a time. But when he returned in the form of the Holy Spirit he would be with all believers at the same time no matter where they went to make disciples. This is truly a source of great comfort and joy.

But is this a word of comfort that was intended solely for the first generation of believers? Although interpreters before Carey thought so, it seems clear from the context

that the answer is “no”. Jesus told his disciples to make disciples “to the end of the age”, that is, until he returns to the earth. Since the first generation of disciples clearly would not be present until the end, each generation must obey Christ’s command to make new disciples. Disciples are to make disciples who will make more disciples. It is the job of all Christians in all ages to fulfill the Great Commission. And though some will have particular spiritual gifts of evangelism or teaching or whatever, the Commission is given to everyone who is a disciple of Christ.

But how do we do this? Just how do we make disciples? Is it a matter of taking someone through an Alpha Course or Christianity Explored or some Navigators’ material in a one-to-one or small group setting? While it may include one or more of those things, making disciples is fundamentally our recognition of the one who said he has all authority as our King, and obedience to his command by going, baptizing new believers, and teaching them to obey all that Jesus taught. To make disciples we will have to make good use of our time and relationships, believing that they are all important to Christ our Lord. As Jesus came to the world to reconcile men to himself, we too need to enter the world to “beg” (using Paul’s word in 2 Cor 5:20) that others be reconciled to God and then do whatever we can to help them along this life-long journey. As Christ’s Great Commission so clearly teaches us, the job of making disciples requires that we do not sit back and focus on our problems, but focus on Christ and his power and authority, his command to “go and make disciples,” taking firm hold of his comforting words that he will be with us until the end of the age. 🌀

NOTES

¹ The six ways are: learn, pray, go, send, welcome, and mobilize. See <http://omf.org/us/6-ways/> and <https://class.perspectives.org/psp/sixways.html> (accessed 19 August 2014).

² J. Herbert Kane, *Understanding Christian Missions*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), 140.

³ William Carey, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians, to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens* (Leicester: Ann Ireland, 1792).

⁴ Chris Wright points out that putting “all your apologetic eggs in one textual basket” is an extremely weak practice, particularly if the handle breaks and you discover that the text has been used to support ideas about mission that just aren’t there. Chris Wright, *The Mission of God* (Nottingham: IVP, 2006), 34–38.

⁵ Though he believes that it “reflects the same understanding as the rest of the Gospel,” questions about the originality of Mark’s ending prompt Bosch to locate the Great Commission in Mark 13:10. David J. Bosch, *Witness to the World: The Christian Mission in Theological Perspective* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1980), 69–70.

⁶ An aspiring preacher of the passage might want to consider another potential outline for the passage: all authority, all nations, all things, and always. Myron S. Augsburg, *Matthew, The Communicator’s Commentary* (Waco, TX: Word, 1982), 331. Lest one thinks the “always” makes this foursome a bit artificial, the same Greek adjective is in *pasas tas hēmeras* (lit. “all the days”) as in the others.

⁷ At least three of the women—Tamar, Rahab, and Ruth—were Gentiles and the unnamed Bathsheba was, if not a Gentile herself, the wife of the named Gentile, Uriah. While one would not expect to find such women in the Messianic line, they are in David’s line as much as they are in Jesus’. And all of them had what can only be termed an unnatural relationship with the father of the child who would be the Messiah’s ancestor. This reality would silence any talk that Jesus couldn’t be the Messiah because of Mary’s history.

⁸ The gathering in Galilee could be a significant fulfilment of prophecy. Matthew had earlier called attention to Isaiah’s prophecy that honor would come to “Galilee of the Gentiles” where people walking in darkness would see a great light (Matt 4:15–16; Isa 9:1–2 [Heb.: 8:23–9:1]). In Matt 28, Jesus gathers his disciples in Galilee of the Gentiles (*ethnōn*) where he commands them to make disciples of the nations (*ethnē*). The land of the Gentiles thus becomes the starting point of the Gentile mission. Michael Green, *The Message of Matthew*, BST (Leicester: IVP, 2000), 321. A somewhat different position can be found in Peter Stuhlmacher, “Matt 28:16–20 and the Course of Mission in the Apostolic and Postapostolic Age,” in *The Mission of the Early Church to Jews and Gentiles*, ed. Jostein Ådna and Hans Kvalbein (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 24–27.

⁹ Note the correspondence between Matt 28 and the LXX of Dan 7. Both passages present the Messiah as having authority (*exousia*) over all the nations (*panta ta ethnē*) and reigning for all time.

¹⁰ Bosch helpfully explains the differences between the relationship Jesus had with his disciples and the relationship contemporary Jewish rabbis had with theirs. David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll:

Orbis, 1991), 36–39.

¹¹ John Stott, *The Radical Disciple* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2010), 15.

¹² Andraes J. Köstenberger and Peter T. O’Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission* (Leicester: Apollos and Downers Grove: IVP, 2001), 104.

¹³ From this perspective, “going” is a precondition for making disciples and baptizing and teaching are the way to do it. Stuhlmacher, “Matt 28:16–20,” 19.

¹⁴ Wright, *The Mission of God*, 34–35.

¹⁵ Perhaps we should say this is the first significant step in discipleship. It is clear from the Gospels that many people followed Jesus around as disciples who did not accept him as Messiah or the Son of God. Some who were counted as disciples fell away when the going got tough. Jesus is here giving instructions about what his disciples should do when making disciples.

¹⁶ Ralph D. Winter, “The Highest Priority: Cross-cultural Evangelism,” in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, ed. J. D. Douglas (Minneapolis: World Wide, 1975), 213–225. A more developed examination of people groups can be found in Ralph D. Winter and Bruce A. Koch, “Finishing the Task: The Unreached Peoples Challenge,” *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 19 (Winter 2002): 15–25. This article presents four different ways of looking at people groups: blocs of people categorized according to culture or interest (“affinity”), ethnolinguistic background, or as sociopeoples who share common interests, activities, or occupations, and unimax peoples who are said to be the maximum sized group who can be unified in a people movement.

¹⁷ Karl Ludwig Schmidt, “ἔθνος,” *TDNT*, 2:369. The other terms are *phulē* (a people united by nationality, or descent [commonly used to refer to the tribes of Israel]), *laos* (a people united politically and historically), and *glōssa* (a people united linguistically).

¹⁸ Schmidt says that some 100 of the 160 times the term appears in the New Testament it refers to Gentiles as distinct from the Jews (or Christians). Schmidt, “ἔθνος,” 370.

¹⁹ Though some modern scholars insist that the Trinitarian language could not have come from early church circles, the textual evidence is unanimous in its favor.

²⁰ R. T. France, *Matthew*, TNTC (Leicester: IVP and Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 414–415.

²¹ Notice that this promise to send the Comforter concludes with words of comfort. “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you.... Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” (John 14:27).

²² George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, 2nd ed., WBC (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 256. Paraclete is a transliteration of the Greek word translated “Counselor” in the NIV. Jesus is called the Paraclete in 1 John 2:1 (though the word is lost in the NIV; see other translations that regularly use “Advocate” here).