

A People of The Cross

Matthew 28:16-20

We have been focusing on the cross for the last few weeks. And our purpose over these weeks was not just to learn some things about Jesus and His death—I wanted us to meet Jesus at the cross. I wanted our lives to be changed by the message of the cross. For that is the power of the cross—by the Spirit of God it changes lives.

Peter V. Deison, in his book *The Priority of Knowing God*, tells about Ramad, a man of India who was a member of a gang of robbers. On one occasion, while burglarizing a house, Ramad noticed a small black book containing very thin pages just right for making cigarettes. So he took it. Each evening he tore out a page, rolled it around some tobacco and had a smoke. Noticing that the small words on the pages were in his language, he began to read them before rolling his cigarettes. One evening after reading a page, he knelt on the ground and asked the Lord Jesus to forgive his sins and to save him. He then turned himself in to the police, much to their amazement. Ramad the bandit became a follower of Jesus Christ. And in the prison where he served his sentence for his crimes, he led many others to the Savior. The message of the gospel God became to Ramad "**the power of God unto salvation.**" Romans 1:16.

Paul wrote in 1 Cor 1:18; **"The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it IS the power of God..."**

Jesus went to the cross to save us. And God raised Him from the dead to prove it. The power of the cross of Christ is real. "He has died for sin, to triumph over guilt and condemnation. He has been raised from the dead to triumph over suffering and death" (Piper). God's purpose in the cross and the resurrection is to make a people who would be His very own, a people of the cross—saved by His blood, indwelt by His Spirit, and empowered for His mission. And so as we come to the last message in this series on the cross, I believe we come to the real heart of the matter. Has the cross of Jesus changed your life? And if He has changed you, saved you, indwelt you and empowered you? If so, WHY? What is His purpose in making us His own, in making us a people of the cross?

We see the answer to that in Matthew 28. This passage is often referred to as *The Great Commission*. It is one of the best known of the entire Bible. I have heard it preached and taught all my life. I have preached it myself many times.

In commenting on this passage, John MacArthur has written, "**If a Christian understands all the rest of the gospel of Matthew but fails to understand this closing passage, he has missed the point of the entire book. This passage is the climax and major focal point not only of this gospel but of the entire New Testament. It is not an exaggeration to say that, in the broadest sense, it is the focal point of all Scripture, Old Testament as well as New.**"¹

Baptists are particularly fond of quoting these verses, especially in the context of global missions. However, God has not entrusted His great work merely to missionaries and pastors. He has given it to all believers collectively and to each individually. Sadly, many Christians don't apply this commission personally. They follow Christ only as far as He meets their perceived needs. They serve in the church so long as it fits their desires. But the way of the cross demands more.

Let's take a poll. Write down your response to this question: *what is the purpose of the church?* There are many possible answers, worship, Bible teaching, fellowship, service, etc... However, if the Lord merely wants worship from us, why doesn't He just take us on to heaven where worship is perfect? The same could be said of Bible teaching, fellowship and service. The only reason God has left us here on earth is that we might glorify Him in sharing His purpose of redeeming lost sinners to Himself.

Jesus said in Lk.19:10, "**For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.**" In Jn.17:18, He prayed, "**As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.**" In other words, our priority as the people of God is to be the same priority Jesus had during His ministry. He said in Jn.20:21, "**As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.**"

It is so easy for us to get lost in the busyness of the church that we lose focus on the priority. Like Martha in her kitchen, we can be so busy serving the Lord that we are distracted from our priority to know Jesus and make Him known. In this closing passage, I want to examine some keys for staying on mission, for being a people of the cross.

I. People of the Cross are a Willing People (v.16).

A. The Disciples went where the Lord told Them.

Matthew says that "**the eleven disciples**" went up to "**Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them.**"

Before and after the resurrection, Jesus planned a meeting with His followers in Galilee. He said in Mt.26:32, "**But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee.**" The angel told the women at the tomb that Jesus was "**going before you into Galilee**" (28:7). Then Jesus said, "**Go and tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me**" (v.10). The Bible doesn't tell when or where specifically they were to meet, but Jesus had "**appointed**" or designated such a time on a particular "**mountain.**"

Matthew only mentions "**the eleven**" being present but he does not say they were alone. Jesus told the women that He was "**going before you**" seemingly including them as well. Many Bible scholars believe that this mountain-top meeting was the time that Paul mentions in 1 Cor.15:6 in which "**He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once.**"

When the disciples came to Galilee, it seems evident that they had no idea what would happen. They didn't know what to expect. They were simply willing to take Jesus at His word and obediently keep their appointment with Him. I think they came with a sense of availability and willingness like that of Isaiah who said, "**Here am I! Send me**" (Is.6:8).

B. Our Greatest Asset to Christ is Willingness.

Willingness is the key to effectiveness. It doesn't matter how talented or gifted a person is if he is not willing. I know many gifted and talented Christians who are useless to God simply because they will not make themselves available to Him.

The disciples didn't know what Jesus wanted of them, but they were willing to be available, to meet Him on His terms.

Have you noticed that God, although He knows the future perfectly, reveals little about it to us ahead of time? Even biblical prophecy is often laden with mysterious metaphors, types and shadows. The Father knows it is best for us to experience the future a day at a time.

When I began the walk with Christ, I had no idea I would be a pastor today. When Kathy and I married, we had no idea we would serve the Lord and raise our family in Gardner, KS, for 18 years. We could not have dreamed that we would be living in Grand Junction serving God alongside you. And Right now, I have no idea what God will make of the rest of my life and ministry.

God doesn't unfold the whole plan for us. He simply calls us to be willing, available, and faithful. That was the attitude of the disciples and within a few years they "**turned the world upside down**" (Acts 17:6).

The greatest gift we can give to God is our willingness. There is no limit to what God can do through a willing church.

II. People of the Cross are a Worshiping People (v.17).

A. The Disciples fell down before Christ in Worship.

Picture this scene: word has spread, all those who followed Jesus, not just the remaining 11 disciples, but many, many more of His followers had gone up to Galilee on the promise that Jesus would appear to them all. I imagine Bartimaeus being there along with Lazarus, Martha and Mary. Maybe the woman with the issue of blood, along with the widow from Nain joined them. Perhaps Jairus was there with his daughter. Zacchaeus surely made the trip. So many, as many as 500 hundred, were there waiting when Jesus appeared.

It was "**when they saw Him**" that "**they worshiped Him.**" They fell prostrate on their faces before Him in complete adoration. Imagine that whole mass of people bowing before Him. We don't know what they said but their sentiment must have been like that of Thomas when he finally saw his resurrected Lord. He said, "**My Lord and my God!**" (Jn.20:28).

Then Matthew adds, "**but some doubted.**" What a testimony to the reliability of the gospels! If they were trying to cover a lie, why would Matthew be so brutally honest. Matthew probably was not referring just to "**the eleven**" because they had all already seen the risen Lord in Jerusalem. Probably this refers to some in the crowd who had not yet seen Jesus alive and were amazed and wondered if it was too good to be true. However, like Thomas, they too became witnesses that He indeed was risen.

John Piper says it well when he said, "The fuel for world wide missions is Worship."

B. Worship is not an End in Itself.

So many Christians act like the worship service itself is primarily what Christ has called us to do. Worship is really about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It is about knowing God and learning to love Him through His Son Jesus Christ. Worship is about us throwing off the blinders of familiarity and falling in awe at His feet. True worship changes you because you have been in the presence of God.

Don't talk to me about the quality of the music or the eloquence of the preacher. True worship is more than this. It is a life-changing experience. If you want to examine the worship of a church, if you want to know if a congregation loves Jesus, see how they love lost people. See if they are committed to the Great Commission.

If we love Jesus, we will love people. Homer Lindsey once said, "**Pastor, if you want your church to grow, teach your people to love Jesus. If they love Jesus they will love the people that Jesus loves and they will take the gospel to them.**"

III. People of the Cross Have a Sovereign Lord (v.18).

A. Jesus proclaimed His Authority.

Jesus' death and resurrection shows His absolute, boundless, sovereign authority. He says, "**All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.**" Daniel prophesied of His authority. He saw "**One like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, Which shall not pass away...**" (Dan.7:13-14).

Jesus is the King of kings to whom every knee shall bow! Paul says this about Jesus' authority in Philippians 2:

**8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.
9 Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name,
10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth,
11 and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.**

And Paul says in Ephesians 1 that Jesus exercises that power and authority through the people of the cross, His church:

**19 and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power
20 which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places,
21 far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.
22 And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church,
23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.**

There is nothing in heaven or on earth over which Jesus does not have authority. There is not a culture or an ethnic group or a society or a religion or a language where Jesus does not have the right to be worshiped as Lord. He has authority to be king and Lord and Savior everywhere, to everyone. This is the reason he commands us to make disciples in all the peoples of the world. The authority and supremacy of Jesus over every other religion and culture and society and over all gods is the basis of our world-wide mission.

“Without this declaration of Jesus' authority, we could never go out confidently to make disciples. On what possible basis do we have any right to tell anybody they should change their whole way of thinking and acting and become a disciple of Jesus Christ? Only one thing could justify such outlandish proselytizing all over the world -- that Jesus Christ rose from the dead and has been given an absolute authority over every human being. If Jesus has that kind of authority, then we Christians not only have the right but are bound by love to tell other people to change and become his disciples. And Jesus does have that kind of authority. He is the absolute sovereign of the universe and one way or the other every knee will bow to him” (Piper).

B. We are to live in Submission to His Lordship.

If we are to be a people of priority, if we are to be in the will of God, we must submit to His authority. We cannot say, "**I know what the Bible says but...**" We cannot do things our way. We cannot do what is right in our own eyes. We have to be obedient to His authority as expressed in His Word.

IV. People of the Cross Make Disciples (vv.19-20a).

Notice the word, "**therefore.**" We are to "**go... and make disciples of all the nations**" because of Jesus limitless "**authority.**"

Since Christ's authority extends over the whole earth we must go to "**all the nations,**" all the ethnic groups on the globe. There is no culture and no religion beyond the authority of Jesus and therefore no culture and no religion beyond the great commission. "Not Americanism, not

Western technology, not capitalism, but Jesus Christ is exalted over every culture and every religion. With His absolute authority He lays absolute claim on every person in every place” (Piper)

God has not placed us here to have the best music, the most captivating preaching and the most creative programs. All those things are nice but they are the window dressings on the real priority. Unless we are deliberately going out under Jesus’ **"authority"** with the supreme priority of making disciples, we have missed the point entirely.

The command in this verse is to **"Make disciples."** “Make disciples” literally means to develop learners. A disciple is a learner. A disciple is one who sits at the feet of his master soaking up every word. A disciple is one who desires to conform his life to the life of his master. One of the most important things I think Jesus ever said about becoming a disciple was Luke 14:27, **"Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple."** You see, disciples are people of the cross.

What does that mean? Bearing a cross does not mean primarily having hard times. It means going to Golgotha. It means dying with Christ -- dying to sin; dying to the old attitudes of envy and strife and jealousy and anger and selfishness and pride; and turning to follow Jesus in newness of life. When we make disciples we ask people to come and die to their old, destructive ways and to live for Jesus, who loved them and gave Himself for them.

And Jesus gives three actions that are involved in making disciples, in making people of the cross:

A. We make disciples by Going.

Our priority as Christ’s people is to be used of God in making disciples **"of all the nations."** We are to be **"fishers of men"** (Mat.4:19). Those who truly are disciples are to become disciple-makers.

We are to **"go"** out to **"make disciples."** We are not to wait for potential disciples to come here. The service of the church is not to be designed to attract unsaved seekers but to equip believing disciple-makers to go out to **"all the nations."**

Billy Sunday, who played baseball in the late 1800s and became an evangelist in the early 1900s, once said: “There wouldn’t be so many non-church goers if there were not so many non-going churches.”

Coming to church is not the same thing as going to the world. The church is not the primary place of evangelism. Evangelism is to take place in the home, workplace, neighborhood, school... Until we understand this, we’ve missed the point of the gospel.

B. We make disciples by Baptizing.

To baptize means "to immerse or dip." Baptism pictures the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It symbolizes our union with Him and with His people.

The meaning of baptism develops out of the meaning of discipleship. If becoming a disciple of Jesus means dying to your old life and walking in newness of life with Christ as a follower of Jesus, then it's almost inevitable that the symbolic act of that conversion should signify a death and resurrection. Paul says in Romans 6:3,4, **"All of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death. We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."** So Jesus commands baptism as a part of disciple-making because baptism signifies in an outward way what it means to become a disciple -- death to self and a new life of faith in following Jesus.

Baptism has no saving power but is a symbolic picture. Baptism does not save anyone or even seal his or her salvation. To become a disciple means we are willing to follow Jesus. The first place He leads us is through the waters of public identification with Him.

We baptize "**in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.**" Because we are saved, we are in union with the Godhead as each of the persons of the Godhead is in union. We are to baptize in the "**name,**" that is, one name, not three.

C. We make disciples by Teaching.

Once a person is saved and baptized, the lifelong process of teaching and learning begins. We are to teach "**all things that I have commanded you.**" As Paul said to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:27, "**I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.**" We are to teach it all. We are to wrestle and grapple with God's Word and bring our thinking and our actions in line with it.

The new life of a disciple is a life of obedience to Jesus' commandments or it is not a new life at all. It is worthless to acknowledge the Lordship of Christ in baptism and then ignore his commandments. So all disciple-makers must be teachers and disciples must be continual learners.

But teaching people to obey Christ is not easy. Obeying Christ in all He commanded is harder yet. It requires tremendous spiritual power. And Christ was so gracious to leave us with a word of comfort and power: "**Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age**" (v. 20).

V. People of the Cross are a Reliant People (v.20b).

Jesus promised to be with His people "**always even to the end of the age.**" We are to rely not on our ingenuity, creativity and strategic planning, but upon His abiding power in our lives. The reason that promise is packed with power is that the one who made it has all authority in heaven and on earth (v. 18). He is not powerful and far away. Nor is he present and weak. But he is with us and he is all-powerful -- for ever. The great commission is sandwiched in powerful grace, and so are we.

David Livingston was a world-renowned doctor/missionary by the time he returned to his native Scotland to address the students at Glasgow University. He had spent the previous sixteen years in the service of God on the continent of Africa. As he stood before those young men and women, they could see the tremendous price Livingston had paid. More than 27 fevers had coursed through his veins, leaving his body emaciated and ravaged. One arm hung useless at his side, the result of being mangled by a lion.

Livingston said to them, "Shall I tell you what sustained me amidst the toil, the hardship, and loneliness of my exile? It was Christ's promise, 'Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end.'"

What Christ promised to the disciples on the mountain top nearly two thousand years ago is your promise today. You can experience the same presence of God which Livingston experienced. The question is will you be people of the cross? --A willing people, a worshipping people who submit to the authority of Jesus, a people who go to make disciples, baptizing and teaching them, a people of the cross?

In American history, the Battle of the Alamo stands as a prime example of the kind of decisiveness Jesus calls for. In 1836 a band of fewer than 200 men defended the little mission in San Antonio, against General Santa Anna's 6,000 Mexican troops. For two weeks they held the Alamo against impossible odds. Then, on March 5, the night before what would surely be the final assault, William Barret Travis, the commander of the Texans, called a meeting of his men. Telling them he knew the enemy would break through the walls on the morrow, he drew his sword and cut a line in the sand. He invited those who wanted to stay and defend to the death to

cross the line. Jim Bowie, who was sick on a pallet, asked to be carried across the line.

The cross of Calvary is the dividing line. When Jesus went to the cross, He drew a line in the sand. And so today Jesus has drawn a line in the sand and he asks you to cross it. Will you stand united with him? Will you be a people of the cross?