

**Matthew's Mountain Motif Ends With Jesus' Great Commission.** We are at the conclusion of Matthew's Gospel. The setting is an unnamed mountain in Galilee where the Disciples are instructed to meet Jesus. Now according to Dr. Stanley Saunders from his commentary on this passage, this is one of many mountain settings that Matthew uses for the purpose of revealing God's divine presence & authority in Jesus.

**The Mount of Temptation:** For instance, Matthew brings us to a mountain scene at 4:8-10, where Satan tempts Jesus with an offer of world empire if he would only transfer his trust & worship from God to him. Like the song says, "Everybody wants to rule the world"...Right!?! Isn't it about power and control and greed and fame and having your own way & owning all the real estate!?! Doesn't matter who gets hurt along the way!

Jesus knows the type of empire Satan offers... it's based on fear, on the power to war, to kill, to take, to enslave, to squander & destroy. Dr. Saunders calls this empire one "of debt & slavery, of the reign of death." Jesus firmly & wisely rejects Satan's offer, telling him to get lost. Jesus knows that the time of self-serving, war-mongering, destructive, death-dealing earthly empire is passing away.

Jesus Knows this isn't the kind of world God intended to create. Do you know what's telling? When you compare the Creation story in Genesis to the Babylonian creation story, it's like night & day! Barbara Brown Taylor describes the shaping of the creation narrative in Genesis as a counter-cultural protest of the people of Israel against the creation story of their Babylonian captors. While their oppressors saw the origins of the universe as violent & bloody, the Israelites told their children a different story, a story rooted in (God's) goodness and blessing. Knowing we serve a gracious & loving Creator, Jesus teaches us...again on a mountain...how God's goodness and blessing are at the epicenter of the God-honoring, life-giving, person-affirming, mercy-extending, peace-loving, earth-mending kingdom Jesus will bring in by his death and resurrection.

**The Mount of Transfiguration:** Only Jesus could usher in this kingdom as demonstrated on another mountain at Matt 17:1-5, the Mount of Transfiguration. We read of Jesus' transcendent, heavenly glory & affirmation as God's Son and chosen Messiah. It's on full display before Peter, James and John...and us. Not only that, but the cloud of Almighty God's presence envelopes the disciples and speaks to them as to Jesus identity as God's Son and the importance of listening to and following Jesus.

Jesus has come as "God with us"..."God in the flesh" embodying the message of God's love, healing and forgiveness. Jesus came to mend the breach that exists between heaven & earth, between God and us, ever since our first parents rebelled and sinned in the Garden of Eden. Eden is where heaven and earth met & God established his throne. God dwelt in loving communion with humanity & called us into eternal, joint ruler-ship as his stewards over the world he created. Unfortunately, instead of trusting & listening to God, humanity chose self-will, self-rule and death over the wise, life-giving, life-affirming and life-preserving word & will of God.

**Mount Calvary:** After his exaltation, Jesus leaves the mount, and travels to Jerusalem in his role as God's suffering Servant. He will confront the dark powers of this world & be rejected. Rome's most powerful tool...death on a cross...will be used against God's Son, who embodies God's kingdom. Again as Dr. Saunders tells it: "Rome's control of the apparatus of death will turn up hollow. Christ rises from the dead & the power of death is broken. The kingdom of heaven remains & has already won the crucial victory."

**The Mount of Commissioning:** Now here on a mountain somewhere in Galilee, Jesus will give his disciples their final instructions in light of his departure. These final instructions called the Great Commission, are given to the disciples and the church, because Jesus wanted them to be crystal clear on who he was, what he was calling them to do, and where he would be while they did it. As one pastor said, "the Great Commission is not the "Great Suggestion!" Jesus left no doubt about what the disciples, and we as the church, are supposed to do.

**The Authority Behind Jesus' Commission.** In the text Jesus said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples." All

authority. The one we follow sits on the right hand of God the Father Almighty as Lord & King & Judge over all nations. The one we follow has been invested with *all authority*, not only on earth, but also in heaven. This is meant to give us confidence as we represent him to a broken world.

What does this authority say? Jesus tells his Disciples, "Go make disciples, baptize and teach." He says it to a group of ordinary people from the everyday walk of life. He says this to a group of followers living between two kingdoms, the 'here and now' of the present, broken, earthly empire and the heavenly kingdom to come. He says this those whose initial response to the presence of the risen Jesus is a mixture of worship and doubt. Yet, despite their doubts, the Holy Spirit will take this bunch of shaky individuals, who question at first whether it's worth the risk to follow Jesus or not, and give them the power to get it done. They'll become the church, a body of believing, encouraging, working, loving, unified & committed people, led of the Spirit to accomplish this task.

What does it mean to make a disciple? Well, what is a 'disciple'? A follower. As Christians, we are *followers* of Jesus. And we are to *make* other followers. First, we go to them. This is what Jesus himself did. He went to others and invited them to follow. Second, we baptize them. To baptize is to call to a symbolic and public proclamation of renouncing and burying an old, sinful life and rising to a new one. It is to say, "I am all in." Third, we teach them to obey. To teach to obey is not simply to impart information, but rather to *train for action*.

John Wesley called on followers to renew their faith through Bible study, worship, practicing the means of grace and taking that faith back into the world through acts of mercy.

There's **The Inclusiveness of Jesus' Commission**. The text describes the dimensions of our assignment as encompassing "all nations." This is not an us-against-the-world system. Our fractured world is in desperate need of the uniting & reconciling love of God which triumphed in the Crucified & Risen Christ.

As it was ingrained in me...the church is the only institution in the world that exists for the benefit of those who aren't members. Our calling is not to manipulate or

threaten people to change their lives. It's to help people become students and teachers of the way Jesus lived & taught: to live loving lives. How do we do that? The same way he did: we show them.

Will Willimon wrote a few years ago, "To many outside the church, the Church is like a football huddle. You know that something important is being said there, but you can't understand a word of it, and all you can see is their rear ends."

Get out there then in Jesus' name. As you go, disciple!!! Take your passion and love for God and translate it into a passion and love for people! Forgive when everyone else wants revenge. Be loving when others are filled with hate. Don't give up on people when everyone else has written them off.

In the worst of conditions, in the most awful of times, we show love. There are times when we have to ask God to help us love, for we can only love with God's help. And we, as the church, who have said yes to Jesus.... need to find others, so they can say yes to Jesus, too.

Finally, we have **The Length of Jesus' Commission**. It's life-long! We are called first to be disciples, and then to make disciples. So, every Christian is both a learner and a teacher. We are called upon to "Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the person who takes refuge in Him!" We are to live with Jesus every day, listening to him, learning from him. We are to live our lives as his faithful followers, so that all who look at us will know that we belong to him, that increasingly our lives look and sound like Jesus, and that this is of first importance to us.

The Great Commission is a joint effort. God is not just asking us to do this for Him. He is asking us to do this with Him. It is the only time where the teacher gets involved with the student in doing the homework & carrying out the assignment! Jesus says he will be with us to the end. Whatever Christ calls us to do, he gives us the grace and power to do, and he is with us as we do it. He promises, "Remember, I am with you always, even to the end of the world."