



## Mandate on the Mountain [Steven C. Hawthorne]

“And the angel answered and said to the women, ‘...Go quickly and tell His disciples that...’ He is going before you into Galilee, there you will see Him.” Matthew 28:5-7

“Go and take word to My brethren to leave for Galilee, and there they shall see Me.” Matthew 28:10

“But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated. And when they saw Him, they worshiped some were doubtful.” Matthew 28:16-17

They waited on the mountain, one of the highest hills overlooking the Sea of Galilee. There wasn’t any question of being in the right place. They had met with Jesus there before. Jesus had sometimes prayed there. In James, John and Peter took them to the very spot where said Jesus had appeared in blazing white glory.

They stared at the lake below, breaking the silence to remember out loud some of the things that happened around the lake. There were only eleven of them now. To a man, each of them wondered privately what would happen when came. Expectations ran high and wild. Time passed slowly. They waited and wondered.

He had never been predictable, even in the early Galilee days. What would happen now that He had died? Or was He alive? Each of them had already seen Him again, or what seemed to be Him. None of the encounters had been routine. He had walked through locked doors. Or He had managed to walk for miles at the side of close friends while remaining incognito, then vanishing when they recognize Him. Or He had appeared to be a gardener doing morning routines. Or just another guy on the beach. You could be staring at Him and not know it was Him, and then look again and nearly die of shock when you suddenly recognized Him. Ever since His death, and what certainly looked like His resurrection, He had met them unannounced, by surprise, apparently at random moments. But now there was an appointed meet Him. What would He say? It’s hard to imagine Jesus could have arranged an encounter that would have gotten their attention any more than He did.

Even though they were each looking out for Him, He finally appeared, He startled them all as He slowly walked toward them from a distance. Who was this person? Was He really alive? Or was He a ghost? Some doubted, but every single one of them bowed down and worshipped. That must have surprised them too. This was the first time they had worshiped Him in full-blown honor of who He was. They would never forget it. And they would not forget what He said.

When He spoke, His voice wasn’t loud, but the words were so direct that it felt like He was speaking right through them. As if there were a crowd of people behind them. Later they would realize that He had been speaking to everyone that would ever follow Him.

Four times in His statement, Jesus used the word “all” to declare the destiny of all of history. Looking at each of the four “alls” may be the simplest way for us to understand what He said: all authority, all peoples, all that He commanded, and all the days.

### All Authority]

There was something different about Jesus as they watched Him stride closer to them. Yes, He was alive from the dead. That was enough to addle their minds; but there was something else about Him, as if He was supercharged with an awesome power. He exerted confident authority as long as they had known him. He had always been open about His authority: He had simply done whatever His Father had given Him to do with heaven-bestowed authority. But He was greater now. He was not wearing a crown or swinging a scepter He was their friend Jesus, with the same deep and patient grace. But He was somehow immense before them. He was regal and global and dangerous. He was king of all the earth. They knew it before He even said a word.

“All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth.” It didn’t surprise them at all that Jesus spoke about Himself. It made sense as He spoke. God Almighty, the Ancient of Days, had bestowed upon Jesus unsurpassed authority. They would ponder it for years and never fathom the depths of it all, but it made sense: Christ had triumphed over evil at the cross. Because of that victory the Father had exalted and honored His Son as the head of all humankind. He now held dominion over angelic entities that inhabit unseen heavenly realms. He now had power to push history in any direction that suited Him. He had been given kingdom authority to bring forth the fullness of the Kingdom of God.

I think John, one of the eleven who was there on the mountain, much later in his life was shown this very transfer of authority from Father to the Son from heaven's time-altered viewpoint (Rev 5:1-14). John was shown God Almighty, seated on His throne, holding a seven-sealed scroll in His hand. All of heaven yearned to see what was in this document, virtually the deed of earth's destiny. God's answer to every injustice and grief appeared to be bound in it, ready for implementation. The scroll contained the fates and glories of the final generation of every nation. The highest hopes ever imagined are all surpassed in it: every evil vanquished; every worthy person: honored. It was the missing final chapter to the human story, a wondrous finale' under the headship of a Messiah.

Why did John weep when he saw hope in written form? Without a worthy person, God's purposes would be left unfulfilled. There was no executor. Could it be that there was no one with authority to carry out His will? "Stop weeping" John is told. A worthy one was found: "behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals" (Rev 5:5). The person of God's choice is fully human, from the lineage of David, but He is altogether divine, the Lamb that comes from the very center of the throne. The Father grants this glorious man Christ Jesus the ultimate authority to carry out all of His will.

The Ancient of Days has awarded all things to the Son of Man. Who will ever withstand His wisdom? Who can daunt His determination to heal the nations? What demonic power might ever intimidate Him in the slightest way? Who can deflect His desire to gather all peoples to Himself? Never has there been such power in the hands of any person. He will never be surpassed. He will never abdicate His Kingship. He will never stop until He has finished the fullness of the Father's purpose.

## All the Peoples]

This glorious man now stood before them. He paused after speaking of His authority, letting purpose virtually crackle in the air. He could authorize anything. What would He call for?

"Therefore... go and disciple all the peoples."

They understood then what later readers of translations may miss, that the primary action word was "disciple." The other action words, "go...baptizing... and teaching" were all commanded actions, but they each filled out part of what Jesus meant by the pivotal command: "Disciple all the peoples."

## A Goal, Not a Process]

Jesus spoke as if they could see every single nation from the hill on which He stood. To disciple each one of the nations meant that there would be a once-for-all change among every one of the tribes, languages, and peoples.

In the syntax of His sentence, the Greek word translated "make disciples" required an object for the discipling action. The scope of that object (in this case "all the peoples") would define the extent of the discipling action. The mandate should never be abbreviated as merely "make disciples," as if Jesus simply wanted the process of disciple-making to happen. The expression must stand as a whole: "disciple all the peoples." Jesus was setting out a super-goal. A discipling movement was in the destiny of every people on earth. He was giving them the task of starting the movements.

Jesus did not emphasize the process of communicating the gospel. In fact, He said nothing about the gospel itself. They were not mandated merely to expose people to the gospel. They were commissioned to bring about a result, a response, a global following of Jesus from every people. It was a task to be accomplished. And it would be completed. No doubts crossed their minds about that. Jesus always finished everything He set out to do.

## The Peoples]

Most translations today read "all nations." When modern ears hear the word "nation" we immediately think of the idea of a "country" or a "nation state." But the Greek word is *ethne* from which we get our word "ethnic." Although the term sometimes was used to refer to all non-Jews or to all non-Christians, when it is used with the Greek word meaning "all," it should be given its most common meaning: an ethnic or cultural people group. For clarity we use the term "people group."

Today, as it was in the days of those disciples, people still group together in enduring ethnic identities. There are several facets to the way people groups are identified: Linguistic, cultural, social, economic, geographic, religious, and political factors can each be part of what gives formation to the peoples of the earth. From the viewpoint of evangelization, a "people group" is the largest possible group within which the gospel can spread as a discipling, or church planting movement without encountering barriers of understanding or acceptance.

The disciples would not have for a moment mistaken the mandate to refer to the political nation-states of the world. Each of the eleven were from a region called "Galilee of the Gentiles" (the Greek word translated "Gentiles" in Matt 4:15 is the identical word *ethne* which means "peoples" or "nations" in Matt 24:14 and 28:20). Galilee in that day was known for a multiplicity of diverse peoples living with different languages and customs (John 12:20-21, Matt 8:28 and others).

They knew the Scriptures spoke of peoples. They knew themselves as descendants of Abraham, destined to bless the clans and extended "families" of the world (Gen. 12:3, 22:18, 28:14). They knew of the Messianic Son of Man, whose kingdom reign would extend over "all peoples, nations, and people of every language" (Dan 7:14).

Going to the nations Christ told them to be ready to change locations in order to do this task. The “going” was not an incidental matter, as if He was saying, “whenever you happen to go on a trip, try to make a few disciples wherever you are.” For years they had traveled with Him, watching and helping as He systematically covered entire regions (Mark 1:38, Matt 4:23-25). He had sent them more than once to specific peoples and places, always directing them to enter into significant relationships in order to stimulate lasting movements of hope in Christ’s kingdom. The gospel was not to be announced without actually going to the places where all people lived (Matt 10:5-6,

11-13, Luke 10:1-3, 6-9). Now He was sending them to distant lands to do more of the same in order to leave behind household-based movements of discipleship and prayer.

## All that I Commanded]

Jesus gave them two simple specifics about discipling the peoples: baptizing and teaching. Before we interpose our much later understanding of what baptism was all about, or what makes for ideal topics for teaching, consider what those first followers of Jesus must have heard.

## A People For His Name]

Jesus phrased the directive, “baptizing them into the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.” They had met Jesus while John was baptizing people. That baptism marked a repentance from former life, a cleansing and a participation in the people of God ready for the fullness of the kingdom of God.

The disciples had begun to baptize people too, eventually baptizing even more than John the Baptizer (John 4:1-2). By that baptism people had declared their repentance and readiness to follow the soon-to-come Messiah. It marked a loyalty change. The baptized person was virtually pledging themselves to live under the governance of the Messiah when He arrived.

Now Jesus was again sending them to baptize. They could not have fully comprehended at that moment, but they would later see what Jesus meant by the result: A new community would be formed by this baptism. The three-fold name was not a formula to chant emptily while performing the ritual. Those they baptized were to be introduced to God personally as He had fully revealed Himself. They were no longer waiting for a mystery Messiah. Every baptized disciple could relationally encounter the Father who had given His Son, and who would bestow on them the Holy Spirit of God.

World-over, by this baptism, God would gain for Himself a people who would know personally what God wanted declared globally. The baptized people would wear His name publicly in every people group. They would later recognize that God was forming, from all the peoples, “a people for His name” (Acts 15:14)

## Living Under His Lordship]

When Jesus said “teaching” they would not have had the slightest impression that they were to transfer mere knowledge to newcomers. They heard Him say, “teaching them to obey.” They were not sent to round up students for classes in Hebrew ways and thought. They were supposed to train people to know and follow Jesus in the fullest way that He could be known. Their evangelism was to be primarily a matter of life-obedience rather than pressing for conformity of beliefs. It was all about faith, but aimed, as Paul described it later, for “the obedience of faith among all the peoples.” (Rom.. 1:5).

Obedying Jesus had never been a vague, subjective affair, with every devotee of Jesus fabricating His own sense of discipline. Jesus had taught them very few and very clear commands. None of these commands had anything to do with the legalistic merit-making of religious systems. The primary command is a simple and universal command, addressed to all of His followers: “Love one another.” It’s impossible to love “one another” on one’s own. It takes two or more to fulfill this reciprocal command in a conscious way. Jesus was forming a community of life-giving joy under His Lordship.

They were amazed by the rightness of it all. How fitting, how proper, how calmly urgent it was to summon people to follow Him from every nation. Jesus wasn’t expressing runaway ambitions. The Ancient of Days had exalted Him as the only redeemer and the final judge of every man, woman, and child who had ever lived. Only He could fulfill the destiny of every clan and tribe of earth’s peoples.

## All the Days]

“And lo, I am with you...” The final command was actually “Behold” which meant “Watch for me. Keep utterly focused on me. Lean and look to me.” He had just commissioned them to go the most distant places of the planet. But He was not sending them away from Him. He was actually beckoning them to come nearer to Him than they ever had been. He was not merely passing on some of His power. That might have been the case if He was announcing His departure. Instead, He declared that He was on the planet to stay, wielding every ounce of His authority until the end of days. He Himself would be with them every single day until the end of the age.

Not long after, from another mountain near Jerusalem, they would watch Him as He was lifted into the sky (Acts 19-12). From that city “they went out and preached everywhere.” As they went, they were convinced that Jesus had not just disappeared. He had been Enthroned in heaven. But they remembered what He had said about being with them. And He was! As the Gospel of Mark records it, at the same time that Jesus sat “at the right hand of God,” He also “worked with them” as they departed to the four corners of the planet to evangelize distant lands (Mark 16:19-20).

The age of which Jesus spoke has not yet ended. Every day since that meeting, Jesus has been “with” those who are fulfilling His mandate.

As you read this, today is also one of those days. Jesus knew this very day would come when He spoke on the mountain. He knew about you. And He knew about the peoples that would follow Him during the days of your life. Can you imagine yourself on the mountain, knees to the ground, eleven men at your side, hushed to hear Him say these words? You have every right to imagine yourself being there, because Jesus actually spoke these words. And when He spoke these words, He spoke with deliberate clarity to every person who would ever follow Him. That includes me and you. What shall we do in response to Him? He has given all of His people a mandate to labor with all of his authority to bring about obedience to all He commanded among all the peoples. How can we do other than give Him all that we are?

## End Notes]

1. Angels had directed them to Galilee “He is going before you into Galilee, there you will see Him” (Matt 28:7) and to a mountain “to the mountain which Jesus had designated” (Matt 28:16). It was probably the same mountain near the Sea of Galilee (Mark 9:9,14,30) where Jesus had appeared in glory, hearing the Father’s voice with Peter, James, and John present (Mark 9:1-9 = Matt 17:1-8 = Luke 9:28-36). This event is sometimes referred to as “The Transfiguration.”
2. After Jesus had been seen walking on water, Matthew 14:33 mentions that those who were in the boat worshiped him. Mark says that they were merely astonished with hardened hearts. Matthew 28:17 may be describing a similar occasion of bewildered fear, but in my view, Matthew 28 is the beginning point of sustained worship of Jesus for all that they knew him to be.
3. The verb “mathetuesate” in this form is transitive, which means that it requires a direct object to make sense. The entire phrase must be taken together, “mathetuesate panta ta ethne” as an integral verbal idea.
4. Some English versions translate the word for “Behold” as an interjection instead of an imperative with the word “Surely” or “Lo.”
5. The Greek expression translated “every day” uses the same Greek word translated as “all” three times earlier in the passage
6. Regarding the expression “I am with you,” compare Genesis 26:3, 24; 28:14-21; Exodus 3:12; Deuteronomy 31:8, 23; Joshua 1:5; Judges 6:16. When God speaks to Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Joshua and Gideon, saying “I am with you” it is in the context of a nearly impossible mission. Temple builders Solomon, and later, those working with Haggai, were told to look for God being with them (1 Ki. 1 1:38, and Hag 1:3, 2:4). Since God announces that He Himself will be the primary power as each of these accomplished their respective missions, it is almost as if God was really saying to them, “You will be with me.” In these passages, and most likely in Matthew 28:20, the point is not reassurance or comfort in solitude, but rather God’s empowering leadership.