

*There are, in the end, only two ways open to us: to honestly and honorably make an admission of how far we are from the Christianity of the New Testament, or to perform skillful tricks to conceal the true situation.*

- Soren Kierkegaard

Although I am not a fan of this Dutch Philosopher... I think that he makes an excellent point. He wrote in the early 1800's... (often critical of the church)... but I think his observation is even more true today!

Consider this mission statement of a well-known university:

*"To be plainly instructed and consider well that the main end of your life and studies is to know God and Jesus Christ."*

Founded in 1636... this university employed exclusively Christian professors... emphasized character formation in its students above all else... and placed a strong emphasis on equipping ministers to share the good news. Every diploma read, "*Christo et Ecclesiae*" around "*Veritas*," meaning "*Truth for Christ and the Church.*" You've probably heard of this school. It's called **Harvard** University.

But only 80 years after its founding... a group of New England pastors sensed Harvard had drifted too far from its founding ideals. Concerned by the secularization at Harvard... they approached a wealthy philanthropist who shared their concerns. This man... (Elihu Yale)... financed their efforts in 1718... and they called the college Yale University. Yale's motto was not just *Veritas* (truth) like Harvard... but *Lux et Veritas* (light and truth).

Today... Harvard's and Yale's legacy of academic excellence are still intact. But neither school resembles what their founders envisioned. In

1986... at the 350th anniversary celebration of Harvard... Steven Muller... former president of Johns Hopkins University... bluntly stated... "*The bad news is the university has become godless.*" ... Larry Summers... (the former president of Harvard)... confessed... "*Things divine have been central **neither** to my professional nor to my personal life.*"

Harvard's and Yale's founders were unmistakably clear in their goals: academic excellence and Christian formation. ... Today... they do something very different from their founding purpose. ... What happened to Harvard and Yale... is called "Mission Drift."

Mission drift is not just a phenomenon that is true about colleges and universities. Y.M.C.A. (which stands for "Young Men's Christian Association") was founded on June 6, 1844 by George Williams in London. Its aim was to put Christian principles into practice by developing a healthy "body, mind, and spirit". Physical exercise, education, and Bible study were the three ***pillars*** of the organization. Today, the YMCA is almost completely secularized. It has largely left its Christian training and development and is exclusively known for their physical fitness programs (and the 1978 disco song by the - the Village People.)

We can observe denomination after denomination go through "mission drift" (Lutherans... Methodists... Presbyterians... and yes... even Baptists... to a very large extent... have experienced such "mission drift" that they bear no resemblance -at all! - to the movements that Martin Luther... Charles and John Wesley... and John Knox started.) Living Water is affiliated with Conservative Baptists of America – an organization that I have seen go through mission drift since I graduated from one of its seminaries in 1986.

Individual churches are just as vulnerable to mission drift. (In most cases... this is where it begins.) Well... what about our church (Living Water)...? Are we in danger? Let me say this as strong as I can – **YES!**

If you don't believe me... or think that there is any possibility that Living Water has experienced some mission drift... then I beg you to pay close attention to our passage this morning. It is the standard of measurement... for us to see **IF** we have... and **how far** we may have drifted off course.

Let me just tell you (up front) that I believe we have strayed... and God is calling us to return. I don't say this flippantly... and I won't preach this message flippantly.

Earlier this week... I told a few of you that I was experiencing a certain nervousness about today passage... and I asked you to pray for me. I cannot recall ever feeling so nervous about a passage... because of its importance. (Of course)... **all** of Scripture is important... and I almost feel guilty about being so nervous about this one. But my heart has been stirring all week... and I am grateful for the prayer! By the end... today... I hope that God stirs all of our hearts. I am certainly praying for that!

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More than one commentator has referred to our passage this morning as “the climax and major focal point (not only of this gospel) but of the entire New Testament.” John MacArthur... takes it one step further... saying:

*"It is not an exaggeration to say that, in its broadest sense, it is the focal point of all Scripture, Old Testament as well as New"*

So... I am going to read our passage this morning in its entirety – **and** – I am going to ask if you would stand with me as I read... so that we might recognize together and treat our passage as the climax and focal point that it is.

### **Matthew 28:16-20**

With Matthew 28:16-20 we have come to the conclusion of a journey with Jesus through the Gospel of Matthew... a journey that began with His birth and has continued through His life... His teaching... His miracles... His death... and (in the last week's section of Matthew 28)... His resurrection. Now today... we come to what has been called "the Great Commission"... a commission given by the Lord Jesus to those early disciples... and to all His followers in subsequent generations. It's a call we need to hear afresh as a church... because it shows us if we have strayed.

Matthew ends his gospel by telling us how Jesus sent His disciples out to make more and more disciples – everywhere. It is a story that continues today... and the beauty of it... is that you and I are part of this story.

When we read the Book of Acts... we discover that it took the apostles a long time to come to grips with that compelling word "**Go**." ...But by the time Matthew wrote his gospel... which includes the Great Commission... the marching orders of Christ (that we see in it) had been taken seriously... (especially by Paul)... the latecomer to the apostolic band. The

frontiers of the church were already expanding far and wide... when Matthew penned these verses.

But the work of reaching the nations is still far from finished. Thousands of tribes do not even have a page or two of the Bible in their native tongue. Untold millions... are still untold!

Let's go back to the first verse of our passage...

### **Matthew 28:16**

Following the instructions given to the women by the risen Jesus... the eleven disciples went to Galilee. Jesus directed the two women... who in turn directed the eleven men... to take a hike up to Galilee... and then up a mountain. Obviously... Judas was no longer a part of their group... having hanged himself in despair for betraying an innocent man into the hands of his enemies.

Galilee is about a hundred miles from Jerusalem. ... But did you ever stop and wonder "*why this walk?*" ... They we all gathered in Jerusalem at the time. Why didn't Jesus have His meeting with them... where they already were...? Does God just like to inconvenience us?

Well... such a walk takes some trust. (I don't know)... they might have been thinking the same thing. "*Why not meet us here... Jesus...?*" ... Or maybe some were thinking... "*Should we believe the women who told us that Jesus wants us all the way up there...?*" ... Don't underestimate what faith it must have taken to do that "which Jesus had directed them." Jesus is already building up their faith... before He gives them His commission.

So they acted in faith... went up to Galilee... and met Jesus on a mountain. ... We are not told which mountain it was... but perhaps it was the one where the Lord had given His sermon on the mount. Up in Galilee (which was situated between the thriving Gentile world and the dying Jewish world)... and high up on a mountain... overlooking the very places that were filled with memories of their three years with Jesus... doing ministry - the Lord sought to re-focus and re-commission His confused disciples.... It was fitting that Jesus would give His mandate to reach the nations in that place.

The fact that Jesus met them on a mountain... also reminds us of the giving of the Torah... from Mount Sinai... which was another important commissioning... to tell others about God's revealed truth.

Now look at verse 17 again. This is truly amazing!

### **Matthew 28:17**

"*They saw him,*" said Matthew. "*They worshipped him.*" Probably...(?) no more needed to be said! ... However... Matthew had to add... "*But some doubted.*" ... It seems incredible that anyone faced with the overwhelming evidence of the Risen Christ... could have any doubts. ... It said "...they worshipped Him; but some doubted..." ... Both "worship" and "doubt" at the same time seems contradictory... doesn't it...?

The word translated "*doubted*" is *distazō*... which occurs only in the Book of Matthew... (right here... and also in Matthew 14:31.) Perhaps a better translation of this word is "to hesitate." (Usually we hesitate on something because we have some doubt. They are closely related... aren't they?)

Now... in Mathew 14:31... the only other place in the Bible that used this word... it is used in reference to Simon Peter when he walked on the water... then lost his nerve... looked away from Jesus to the angry waves... and began to sink. ... After rescuing Peter... the Lord said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you distazo [waver, hesitate]?" ... This is what some of the disciples were doing... There was some wavering and hesitation going on.

But even though they hesitated... (now get this...) Jesus commissioned them! (*Huh...?*) Yes... He did not wait for them to resolve their doubts. ...*(You say) – "Well that's just crazy!"* ... But let me tell you something.

## **THE BEST WAY TO OVERCOME DOUBT IN YOUR LIFE IS BY BEING OBEDIENT TO GOD**

Listen carefully to what the Scripture says...

### **John 7:17 (ESV)**

*If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority.*

Jesus said this to a group of Jews... when they were in the Temple listening to Jesus' teaching. They asked Him... "*How do we know if what you say is true...?*" And Jesus pointed out that – when we are interested in obeying God... we will know... otherwise God isn't going to give us much assurance at all.

## **THE BEST WAY TO OVERCOME DOUBT IN YOUR LIFE IS BY BEING OBEDIENT TO GOD**

A lot of people who hear or read our passage of study this morning (the Great Commission)... say to themselves..."*Once I no longer have any*

*doubt*" (once God gives me enough assurance)... "*then I'll obey it...*" But it doesn't work that way. Jesus commissioned them... while some were doubting. "*Go! Get moving!*" (Is He doing the same to you?)

Now in terms of Matthew telling us that some of the apostles who gathered with Jesus were doubting... for me... and perhaps the same can be said of you... the realism actually helps rather than hinders my faith. I'm encouraged by Matthew's truthfulness (he didn't have to record "*and some doubted*"), and my faith is strengthened (ironically) by these apostolic shortcomings.

God loves imperfect people into His perfect kingdom... and God uses imperfect people for His perfect plans. (Just look at Him here in our passage)... He uses bipolar disciples! (And then look at ourselves)... Don't we go all back and forth from worship to doubt? — as we work to establish His Kingdom here on earth...?

OK... let's get to the test part of our passage... where we can find out how we are doing. Have we experienced any "mission drift" here? ... To what extent are we believing and acting upon what Jesus said in verse 18...?

### **Matthew 28:18**

Mission drift happens... whenever a church... denomination... or para-church organization submits to anyone or anything - as more primary than Christ. Looking to a strong personality (a fellow human)... to try and please them... instead of Christ... causes "mission drift" in any church or organization.

And you know... as well as I... that denominations and para-church organizations all around us have drifted so far... that they no longer recognize that Jesus is God. They deny what Jesus says here.

This is indeed “the highest Christology to be found in the Bible.” ... How can Jesus say, “All authority ... has been given *to me*” ... when the Lord God in Isaiah 42:8 says, “*I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other ...*”? Let’s face it: Jesus is claiming here that He shares the glorious authority that Israel’s God has said “He will not share with another.” Jesus is claiming to be God. (Show this verse to your Jehovah’s Witness friends... and your Mormon friends. It’s a great verse.)

The Lord set before the disciples a vision of His power. "*All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth,*" He said. The word translated "power" here is *exousia*, which refers to authority or delegated power along with the right to use it. ... But in this context... neither "power" nor "authority" is an adequate translation. As the Lord used it in verse 18... *exousia* means "*all the right of absolute authority and all the resources of absolute power.*"

It is the power a policeman has by virtue of his uniform and badge. But far more so... Jesus Christ has the right to give His orders and the fullest weight of influence to have us comply.

Christ wields absolute authority in Heaven. Cherubim and seraphim... thrones and dominions... unfallen angels... sinless sons of light — from the highest to the lowest they gladly own His sway. ... As they hover over little children... ascend and descend Jacob's ladder... superintend the affairs of local churches in the unseen world... minister to those who are the heirs of

salvation... battle Satan's hordes... or stand by in the hour of death... they are in total submission to His authority and power.

They are all held in check by Christ. Even though they busy themselves... inciting men to war... spreading famine and woe... inciting people to lust... binding youth with drugs... blinding adults with delusions... hindering God's work... or sowing tares among the wheat in the church - at length - they are curbed by the Lord. ... They gnash their teeth in rage... but they bow before the authority and power of the One who says to them... "This far... and no farther."

Being limited in our understanding... we often shake our heads over what appears to be the power and triumph of the foe. ... We cannot explain many of the things Christ's omniscience permits... (things we would expect His omnipotence to hinder.) ... All we know is that He is on the throne... wielding all power and authority on earth as in Heaven... let come what may.

The universe is put under Him so that He might redeem His people... that He might gather a church... that he might defend His chosen... that He might subdue all their enemies... and bring them off as conquerors... and more than conquerors.

For the believer... there should be a glad submission to the lordship of Jesus. This means... in relation to the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20... that we must be open to whatever the Lord calls us to - including serving Him... even if we still have doubt... or see that it will inconvenience us... or challenge us beyond our ability.

## Matthew 28:19

It is crucial to note that this verse begins with “*therefore.*” ... The point is that Jesus... having been exalted... was now in a position to send His disciples forth in mission. ... Their mission is possible because Jesus is so prominent and influential. ... After telling us of His authority over heaven and earth... the next words out of Jesus' mouth are, “*Go, therefore.*” ... He's saying... “In light of My prominence and power, *go!*”

The unbelieving may challenge our right to take the gospel outside of the four walls of our church... They try to intimidate us... and question us “*What gives you the right to force your religion on others?*” ... Well... Matthew 28:18-19 - we have every right to present God's truth. We have a mandate that transcends that of any human political... religious... or economic power. ... We suffer mission drift – if any of us begin to think... “*Oh... I won't bother my friend (or co-worker) with God's truth... I don't have that right...*”

Now I want to point something out... that doesn't often get mentioned. But it has great bearing on how we obey this commission. ... Believe it or not... the word for “go” (in the Greek)... is not written as a command. It is participle. The word is actually “going.” The best translation from the Bible original language is “*while going...*” While going (wherever you go)... make disciples. No matter where we are – we are to make disciples. “Make disciples” is the only command in this verse. (Everything else is the explanation for how we are to make disciples... “baptizing” and “teaching.”)

So... here is what mission drift might look like in a church like ours: People come to a worship service... participate in the life of the church... serve in

the church... and give regularly... all the while neglecting to make disciples. The church has a lot of people who have been Christians for 5, 10, 15, or even 50 years... but who have never led someone (outside of their family) to be a reproducing disciple. Because... in all of their going throughout the week... they are not looking to make disciples. And all too often... even at church... they are not looking to make disciples.

In his penetrating book, *Born to Reproduce*, Dawson Trotman comments on our tendency in the church today:

*The curse of today is that we are too busy. I am not talking about being busy earning money to buy food. I am talking about being busy doing Christian things. We have spiritual activity with little productivity.*

Trotman continues,

*The Gospel spread to the known world during the first century without radio, television or the printing press, because [the writings of the apostles] produced men who were reproducing. But today we have a lot of pew-sitters—people think that if they are faithful in church attendance, put good-sized gifts into the offering plate and get people to come, they have done their part.... If I were a minister of a church and had deacons or elders to pass the plate and choir members to sing, I would say, "Thank God for your help. We need you. Praise the Lord for these extra things you do," but I would keep pressing home the big job—"Be fruitful and multiply." All these other things are incidental to the supreme task of winning a man or woman to Jesus Christ and then helping him or her to go on.*

According to Jesus... to be a disciple - is to make disciples. Scripture knows nothing of disciples who aren't making disciples.

The term "disciples" was the most popular name for the early believers. But being a disciple meant more than being a convert or a church member.

*Apprentice* might be an equivalent term. A disciple attached himself to a teacher... identified with him... learned from him... and lived with him. He learned... not simply by listening... but also by doing.

Disciple making is what happens when we walk through life together as a community of faith... modeling for one another how to follow Christ. ...We show one another how to pray... how to study God's Word... how to grow in Christ... and how to lead others to Christ. This is what Christ's body is to be about. ... Our conversations ought to be filled with Scripture... as we teach people all that Christ has taught us.

There must be some movement to our mission. And the movement in our text is not the movement from sitting in our pews... to standing to sing. Neither is the movement from the sanctuary... to the fellowship hall. Rather... it is the movement that finds ways to see discipleship also happens in every nation..

Once a church loses its passion for this – it suffers mission drift. If there is no zeal for this... if this is not a fire that is burning bright... any church will only drift further and further.

... ..

Verse 19 indicates that we make disciples by baptizing people of all nations. (I wish I could say more about baptism... but my time is limited.) “Baptizing them” here means see that they are solemnly devoted to God. Baptism symbolizes submission to Christ... a willingness to live God’s way... and identification with God’s covenant people. To baptize in the

name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit is to have them affirm the reality of the Trinity.

### **Matthew 28:20**

The commission began with Jesus' announcement that He had received all authority. ... It is now concluded with Jesus' promise to be with His disciples (constantly) - until the end of the age. The disciples' responsibilities are daunting... but they have amazing resources. They (and us)... will need to drink deeply of both the power and the presence of Jesus if we are to fulfill His mandate.

(LISTEN) We can depend on the power and presence of Christ! ... He will give us the courage. He will give us the wisdom. He will give us the harvest. He will give us the strength. ... His presence is not as an observer of our service... but as the source and strength of our service.

Be encouraged... follower of Christ... for **this mission is not based on who we are or what we can do**. This mission is assured based on Christ's presence through His Spirit. When I first came to this church... I recall thinking that the church had such potential with all of its gifts and resources. ... But that's not a biblical mind-set. It doesn't matter how gifted a church is... what programs it offers... or how blessed it is materially... because the people of God can do nothing - apart from power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). However, when the Spirit works among a people... that church can shake the nations for God's glory.

Rather than being based on what we can do... our mission is based on **Who Jesus is and what He is able to do in and through our lives**.

Christ is able to do "*beyond all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us*" (Eph 3:20). ... Oh... how we need to put aside small dreams and worldly ambitions. ... We need to give Christ a blank check with our lives... and then see where He leads.

Together... let's experience the power of His presence with us. We want to be a part of something that is beyond us... something that requires supernatural strength. ... If we ***don't*** want to be a part of something that is beyond us... something that requires supernatural strength – then we certainly have mission drift!

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