

Bible Study Guide: Week of 6-1-2020

1. Read through the passage below
2. Read my notes and commentary
3. Read the questions at the end and ponder or discuss with others

Remember, Jesus promises to be with his followers always, even to the end of the age. Peace be with you!

Pastor Andrew

Matthew 28:16-20

16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. 18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.

Here at the end (as in the rest of the Gospel of Matthew) the main disciples of Jesus (here called the 11, due to the absence of Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Jesus) play an important role in the action. The disciples' action here is in obedience to the command of the angel of the Lord (28:7) and the command of Jesus himself (28:10)—both the angel and the Lord himself told Mary Magdalene, the first witness of the Resurrection to go and tell the disciples to go to Galilee where they would see the resurrected Jesus. We do not know the location of "the mountain to which Jesus had directed them." Matthew doesn't narrate Jesus' directing the disciples to this unidentified mountain and seems to suppose either that the readers of this gospel will already know the identity of this mountain or, more likely that it is not particularly important to the story where or how this happens. What is more important is that this interaction takes place on a mountain. In Matthew's account, mountains serve as symbols of Jesus' divine authority. He sits down (a position of teaching authority) on a mountain to deliver the Sermon on the Mount, for instance. The feeding of the 4,000 (the second of Jesus' feeding miracles) occurs on a mountain in Matthew's gospel. Likewise, the Transfiguration occurs on a mountain. This parallels the accounts of the Old Testament in which Moses and the prophets often met with and partnered with God on mountains. Here, this mountain underscores the authority Jesus claims.

17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.

This verse is a fascinating detail: "They worshiped him; but some doubted." The "they" refers most naturally to the 11 disciples—Jesus' closest followers. And the most natural reading of this verse is that all 11 worshiped him, but at least some of those also doubted. This gives me comfort and hope—doubt and worship are not mutually exclusive. There is room for doubt in worship. There is room for worship in doubt. Jesus, as we will see going forward, does not seem concerned here that some of his 11 closest friends have their doubts. And how much more reasonable do our doubts seem given that we haven't encountered Jesus in resurrected bodily form as his closest followers did? If

they have room to doubt when they have seen and touched Jesus physically and personally, is it not natural that we should have doubts, too?

18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Again, Jesus doesn't seem concerned with their doubts. Instead, he is focused on his mission and his commission. Jesus' claim here is extraordinary, but given that he overcame the most powerful forces on earth—both political (thwarting the will of mighty Rome by overcoming the cross and grave) and physical (defeating death itself)—the point is made clearly that Jesus has power over all things.

19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

And what does Jesus plan to do with this authority? He plans to reclaim the whole of humanity as citizens and heirs of the Kingdom of Heaven. He doesn't have any interest in earthly conquest. He doesn't send the disciples to pillage or punish. He sends them to be agents of reconciliation to the world. Unlike earlier in Matthew's gospel (10:5-6), where Jesus commanded the disciples, "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel," here Jesus sends them to "all nations." The Greek word for Gentiles and Nations is the same word. Matthew 10:5-6 is often called Jesus' "Limited Commission," in contrast to this passage which is often called the "Great Commission."

20 and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

The second part of Jesus' Great Commission that often gets overlooked is to "teach the nations to obey everything I have commanded you." Though we can understand this command in different ways, at its core it implies continued relationship with those whom we interact. We do not merely shepherd someone to the point of conversion and baptism and then abandon them. We are to be engaged in teaching and nurturing their faith. We should all take comfort in Jesus' faithful promise to be with us to the end of the age.

Reflection/Discussion Questions:

1. How would you describe the balance of worship and doubt in your life? Does it comfort you to know that the 11 worshiped; but some doubted?

2. Think about Jesus' words that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him. What would you choose to do with such unlimited authority? How do powers of this world use their limited authority? How does their use of authority compare and contrast with Jesus' use of limitless authority?

3. What does it mean to you to go and make disciples, baptize, and teach them? Is this call merely to the 11 or does it apply to us, as well? If it applies to us, how are we to live this out?