

Matthew 28:16-20 “The Great Commission”
Ruth 1
Psalm 25

November 22, 2015 (Peter)

Introduction: Ruth in the Light of the Great Commission

For Advent this year, we’ll be going through the book of Ruth.

Ruth is one of the four women mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1.

As I started working on that series, I realized how well it ties in with the Matthew series.

In lots of ways.

First, Ruth is named at the beginning of Matthew’s gospel –

as one of the fore-mothers of our Lord Jesus.

Second, Ruth is a Gentile (a Moabite) –

one of the “nations” who are to be disciplined.

Third, Ruth is a story about redemption –

and more particularly, a redeemer who is a son.

Matthew has been telling us that Jesus came “to fulfill the scriptures.”

The whole story of the Bible is fulfilled in Jesus.

So during Advent we’ll be looking at how Jesus fulfills the story of Ruth.

There’s a basic pattern in scripture:

First, God promises that he will redeem his people.

Second, God redeems his people – as he had promised.

And then third, God explains and interprets his great acts of redemption.

For example:

First, he tells Abraham that he will deliver his descendents from their enemies,
and bring them into the Promised Land.

Second, he delivers Israel from Egypt through Moses,
and brings them into the Promised Land through Joshua.

Third, he gave us the first 6 books of the Bible to explain and interpret his mighty deeds
(and then keeps referring back to this throughout the rest of redemptive history!).

That’s one of the big stories.

But then there are the little stories.

Ruth is a little story.

Abraham, Moses, and Joshua all *knew* that they were called by God to play a major role
in this grand story of redemption.

But there is nothing in the book of Ruth that would suggest

that these women *knew* that they had a major role to play!

God never promised Ruth that she would be a fore-mother of the Messiah.

Ruth was just an ordinary widow

who took the extraordinary step of believing in the God of Israel

(the God of Naomi).

Only generations later did anyone realize how important this story was.

In the middle of the story, Naomi must have felt very much like singing our Psalm of response.

Psalm 25 says,

“Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation;
for you I wait all the day long.

Remember your mercy, O LORD, and your steadfast love,
for they have been from of old.

Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions;
according to your steadfast love remember me,
for the sake of your goodness, O LORD!”

Naomi would remember how she and her husband left the Promised Land –
they left Bethlehem seeking bread –
but now her husband and her sons are dead,
and she has no future, no hope.

“Consider my affliction and my trouble, and forgive all my sins...
Redeem Israel, O God, out of all his troubles.”

So let us sing Psalm 25 with Naomi.

Sing Psalm 25

Read Matthew 28

We call this the “Great Commission.”

Did you ever wonder why?

There are lots of “commissions” given in the Bible.

God commissions Abraham to go to the Land of Promise.

God commissions David as King.

God commissions Isaiah and Jeremiah as prophets.

The “Great Commission” is simply the last time that God made such a commission.

All the other commissions pointed to this one,
and are fulfilled in this one.

Many have pointed out that the commissioning of the disciples

echoes many other commissions throughout scripture:

Abraham, Moses, Gideon, Samuel, Isaiah, and Jeremiah – among others!

God takes weak and inadequate people

and calls them (and equips them) with divine power

in order to accomplish his mighty purposes for history.

Just in the last chapter, the disciples were scattered –

running for their lives (running *away* from Jesus).

Now, Jesus calls them to take his message to the nations.

Matthew's gospel opened with a reference to Ruth in the genealogy of Jesus.

She was one of those unlikely characters.

A Moabite – an idolater –

one who would be expected to be an enemy and a subverter of God's people.

But even as God called Ruth to himself and used her to bring salvation to Israel,

so also he now calls this rag-tag band of disciples

to bring the message of salvation to the ends of the earth.

1. "They Worshiped Him": The Goal and Foundation of the Great Commission (v16-17)

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

We're back in Galilee – where we started.

And Matthew highlights the fact that it is the *eleven*.

Sometimes he talks about the "disciples" (a broader term).

But here he focuses on the *eleven*.

It's worth noting that Jesus gives this commission to the eleven.

In the Nicene Creed, we confess that we believe

in one, holy, catholic, and *apostolic* church.

Why do we confess the *apostolic* church?

Because a church that is not founded on the apostles' teaching and fellowship
is *not* a Christian church.

The Great Commission was given to the Apostles.

And the Apostles were called to make disciples.

But no one ever replaces the Apostles.

The original Apostles remain the authoritative standard for all generations.

The Great Commission can never be detached from the Apostles.

We confess one, holy, catholic, and *apostolic* church.

But when the eleven saw Jesus:

¹⁷ *And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted.*

In the outline in your bulletin, I say that worship is the *goal* of the Great Commission.

But it would be equally accurate to say

that worship is the *foundation* of the Great Commission.

When they saw Jesus, they worshiped him.

There is no Great Commission yet.

Jesus has not yet told them what to do.
But when they saw him they worshiped him.

Why do we do what we do in worship?

We want you to see Jesus!

This is why we start *every worship service* with the gospel.

God calls you to come.

And as we see the glory and holiness of God,
we confess our sin and our misery.

But in the middle of our sin and our misery –
we see Jesus.

God reminds us that he sent his Son to pay the penalty for our sin.

And he assures us that our sins are forgiven –

and that sin and death no longer have power over us!

Now, is it possible that this can become “rote”?

Is it possible that we can just “go through the motions”?

Sure!

But the solution to forgetfulness is to *remember*.

“At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him.

But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels,
namely Jesus,

crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death,

so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.” (Heb 2:9)

We see Jesus.

When we gather together with the people of God before the throne of the Father,

we see Jesus.

And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted.

From that day on the mountain in Galilee to the present,

this has been the response to the resurrection of Jesus.

Either worship or doubt (and sometimes both!).

John tells us the *story* of doubting Thomas –

but Matthew only alludes to it.

This simple allusion, however,

reminds us that it’s *okay* to doubt!

It’s okay to be bewildered and uncertain.

Matthew does not explain how these doubts were resolved.

And so the effect of this verse is to highlight how worship and doubt can coexist!

Even *some of the disciples* doubted.
If those who saw the resurrected Savior could doubt –
and still be called as apostles to proclaim the gospel to the nations –
then we too may have our doubts from time to time,
and still worship Jesus!

Because that is the point.
When they saw him – *they worshiped him* – even the ones who doubted.

So the foundation for the Great Commission is worship.

But worship is the goal of the Great Commission as well.

John Piper says this well:
“Missions exists because worship doesn’t.
Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man.”

We bring the good news of salvation to the nations
because Jesus has promised that one day he will make all things right.
We do not yet see everything under his feet –
but we see Jesus.

And so we call the nations to come and worship Jesus.

Why do we worship Jesus?
As we’ve seen throughout Matthew’s gospel,
Jesus claims to be God.
And that claim is renewed in verse 18:

2. “Given to Me”: The Authority of the Great Commission (v18)

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

This is where the whole book of Matthew has been going.
The genealogy of Jesus identified him as the Son of David, the Son of Abraham.

But while Jesus is true man.
He is also true God.
In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus did not just say “thus saith the LORD” –
he said, “I say to you.”

Moses went up the mountain to receive the Word of God.
Jesus goes up the mountain to declare his own Word.

And in the middle of the book, in Matthew 11:27, Jesus said,
“All things have been handed over to me by my Father,

and no one knows the Son except the Father,
and no one knows the Father except the Son
and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”

If you want to know God, you have to come through Jesus.

Talk to any Muslim –

this is *the* stumbling block that Muhammad placed before their feet.

The confession of Islam is that God has no son.

But this is the central confession of our Lord Jesus Christ.

God is *my father*.

We saw at the beginning of Matthew’s gospel
that Jesus had no human father.

He was born of the virgin Mary:

“that which is conceived of her is from the Holy Spirit.”

Therefore God called Joseph to adopt him, in order that he might be the Son of David.

In Daniel 7, Daniel sees a vision of the Son of Man coming

to the right hand of the Ancient of Days

“and to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom,

that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him.” (7:14)

This was true of Jesus *in principle* in Matthew 11.

“But now what had been a vision for the future...has become present reality.

The risen Jesus, vindicated over those who tried to destroy him,

is now established as the universal sovereign,

and his realm embraces not only the whole earth,

which was to be the dominion of the ‘one like a Son of Man’

in Daniel’s vision,

but heaven as well.

At the beginning of the gospel Satan offered Jesus sovereignty over the whole earth,

but his offer was refused (4:8-10);

now Jesus, going the way of obedience to his Father’s will even to the cross,

has received far more than Satan could offer.” (France, 1113)

The magi had looked for the King of the Jews.

Pilate had crucified the King of the Jews.

But now we see Jesus crowned with glory and honor – because of the suffering of death

which he tasted for everyone.

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Jesus.

In Matthew 11, after declaring that all things were given by the Father to the Son,

Jesus said “Come to me, all who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest.”

Now Jesus says because of the *authority* given to him,
“Go.”

3. “Make Disciples”: The Content of the Great Commission (v19-20a)

a. “Go Therefore” (v19a)

¹⁹ *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,*

In English the main verb is a little ambiguous here.

What is the central command?

Is the command to *go*? Or to “make disciples”?

In Greek it is very clear.

The central command is to *make disciples*.

Many have pointed out that you could translate the participle,

“as you go” –

although since the participle modified an imperative,

the participle takes on the force of an imperative.

The point of this grammar lesson is that the central command of the Great Commission
is to make disciples – *wherever you go*.

And you are to make disciples of all nations – *wherever you go*.

Therefore, if there are nations where there are no disciples,
then we have not yet finished the job that Jesus gave us.

(And by “nation” Jesus is not referring to the modern “nation-state” –
but the broader concept of a people-group.)

Notice that Jesus is *not* saying that we should make a few disciples in every nation.

Rather, he is saying that we should make disciples of all nations.

Or, to put it more literally,

“disciple all the nations.”

Some missionaries focus on “unreached people groups.”

And that’s fine.

They are part of “all nations.”

This is why we have sent Rex and Becca to the Tibetans.

But the Great Commission does not discriminate against anyone.

As long as there are nations and peoples and kingdoms

there will be a need to make disciples *everywhere*.

Until everyone everywhere is a disciple of Jesus,

we have not finished the work that Jesus gave us!

So long as you live in the South Bend area,

you are called to make disciples *here*.

But how do you make disciples?

Jesus says that there are two parts:
Baptism and teaching.

b. Baptizing Them in the Triune Name (v19b)

baptizing them in^[b] the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

This also goes back to the beginning of Matthew's gospel.

Jesus himself was baptized by John.

As John said in 3:11-12 –

¹¹ “I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹² His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

John is saying that judgment is coming.

Jesus is the one who will bring fire on the earth.

Jesus is bringing Spirit and fire baptism:

“and the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

Jesus has come to baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

Jesus speaks of this in Luke 12:49-50 –

“I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled!

I have a baptism to be baptized with,

and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!

Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth?

No, I tell you, but rather division...”

But if Jesus is going to bring Spirit and fire baptism on the earth –

then that means that all the earth will be destroyed.

John had wondered – why would Jesus be baptized?

And Jesus replies, “thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.”

He's not talking about a particular prophecy – or a particular statute.

He's saying, “John, think of the big picture here.

How am I supposed to bring Spirit and fire baptism upon the earth,

if I do not first enter into the exile and repentance of Israel?”

Jesus identifies with humanity in a very particular way –

bringing all the curses of humanity upon himself.

And at the Jordan River, when Jesus was baptized,
we saw all three persons of the Trinity:
the Father declared “This is my beloved Son” –
the Son was baptized by John –
and the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus as a dove.

Now in the Great Commission,
Jesus declares that the *name* of God is “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”
These are not three different names for one person.
Rather they are three persons in the one Godhead.

This is why baptism is – and *must be* – Trinitarian.

The Great Commission was especially important in the Trinitarian controversy of the 4th c.

During the fourth century a pastor named Arius,
taught that the Son of God was entirely different in essence from the Father.
He claimed that the Son was the first of all creatures—though above all creatures.

His bishop, Alexander, objected, insisting that the Son was one with the Father.
This launched the Arian controversy—
the debate that resulted in the production of the Nicene Creed.

The Arians said that God is so exalted and so transcendent,
that it was simply impossible for God to get directly involved with his creation.

So they claimed that the Father begot the Son as a lesser being
who would do his dirty work for him.

The church wrestled with this for sixty years.
Most understood from the start that Arius was wrong.
But just because you know that one view is wrong,
doesn't mean that you've figured out which view is right!

They knew that Arius was wrong because their practice of baptism followed Matthew 28:19
“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,
teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”

We are baptized into the *one* name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
They are not three names.
They are *one* name.
Therefore, we have to say that these three are one God.

Our Shorter Catechism says it this way:

Q. 5. Are there more Gods than one?

A. There is but one only, the living and true God.

Q. 6. How many persons are there in the Godhead?

A. There are three persons in the Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost;
and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.

How can you say that there is one living and true God,
and yet this one God exists in three persons?

“How is Jesus—the Son—related to God the Father?”

Why is this question so important?

Does it really matter whether we can figure out how the Father and the Son are related?

The question is not merely an abstract point of doctrine.

The question is “who is our savior?”

And “how are we saved?”

The reason why the early church was convulsed with controversy for sixty years
was because they understood that what was at stake was nothing less than our salvation.

As man, Jesus is the Son of God,

and as the human Son of God (the second Adam) he needs the power of the Holy Spirit
in order to succeed where Adam failed—and to pay the price for Adam’s fault.

But the only way that the second Adam (the new Israel) can succeed

is if the Second Person of the Trinity—the eternal Son of God—becomes a man.

And if we would be disciples of Jesus,

we must be baptized in the name of the Triune God.

On the day of Pentecost,

when the Spirit and fire are poured out upon the church,

what was the response of the people?

“They were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles,

‘Brothers, what shall we do?’” (Acts 2:37)

They understood that if the Spirit and fire had been poured out upon the church,

in other words—that salvation had come to the disciples of Jesus—

then all that was left for them was destruction.

And so Peter replied:

“Repent and be baptized every one of you

in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins,

and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:38)

If you want to participate in the new creation,

the restoration of the Kingdom of God.

If you want to escape the wrath of God’s judgment,

Repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins,

and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Water baptism does not guarantee that you will go to heaven
(don't forget Simon Magus in Acts 8),
but it does visibly mark the difference between those who belong to the Kingdom of God,
and those who don't.

If we take seriously the words of the apostle Peter,
then God uses baptism (together with repentance and faith),
to bring the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Just as Jesus had to be baptized "to fulfill all righteousness,"
so we also must be baptized if we wish to partake of him.

The second part of making disciples is teaching:
more particularly:

c. Teaching Them to Observe All that Jesus Commanded (v20a)

²⁰ *teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.*

Notice that Jesus emphasizes the centrality of *teaching*.

How do you make disciples?

Baptize and teach.

And the order is important.

Baptism is our "enrollment" in the school of Christ.

And those who are baptized must be *taught* to observe all that Christ commanded.

The apostles are commissioned in a way that reminds us of the commissioning of the prophets.

Jesus always said, "I say to you."

He speaks with his own authority.

The apostles – and all pastor after them – can only teach, "Thus saith the Lord."

Teach them to observe what *I* have commanded you.

The church can only teach what Jesus has commanded.

But we need to be careful.

Because discipleship is more than just the communication of information.

Discipleship requires the communication of information.

The word "disciple" means a "learner."

If you are a disciple of Jesus, then you must be committed to *learning*
what Jesus has taught.

But not just learning *about* what Jesus taught.

You must be committed to *putting into practice* what Jesus taught.

I once left out two words in this.

I said “teaching them all that I have commanded you.”

It’s not enough to teach information.

This is why it is crucial that pastors not only teach information,
but also *practice* what they preach.

It’s not enough to say, “here is what Jesus commanded.”

“To be a disciple is to obey Jesus’ teaching.” (France, 1119)

Why should you obey Jesus?

4. “I Am With You Always”: The Presence of Jesus in the Great Commission (v20b)

And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

What does it mean that Jesus is with us?

This is Jesus’ promise that he will guarantee that his mission will succeed.

He has already told us in Matthew 16

that the Gates of Hell will not prevail against the church.

Over and over again throughout the OT,

God promised his servants that he would be with them
to enable them to accomplish their mission.

When Jesus says that he is with us,

the point is not to give us ‘personal comfort’ and make us feel better.

Jesus does not promise to be with you in your own selfish endeavors.

Rather, Jesus is with his church *as we make disciples*.

As we are baptizing the nations

in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit –

and as we are teaching them to observe all that he has commanded,

Jesus is with us!

The danger for us is that we will think that ‘church’ is something we do on Sunday.

We tend to think of our family – or our job – as the central thing about us.

But you were baptized.

And in your baptism the Triune God claimed you as *his*.

And Jesus calls you to share in this mission that he has given to his one, holy, catholic,
and apostolic church.

And he promises to be with you – as you share in that mission.

Yes, it is important that God is with us.

But Jesus point is that *he* is also with us.

God has always been with his people.

But think back to the Old Testament.

God was with them.

How’d they do?

Not so good!

Why does Jesus seem to think that *this time* it will be different?!

Because now, the Word has become flesh and dwelt among us.

And the resurrected, exalted Son of God is present with his people.

And *he* has borne our sorrows and our weaknesses –

and he has triumphed!

He has defeated the powers of sin, death, and the devil!

Therefore, when Jesus says, “I am with you always, to the end of the age,”

he is saying that *finally* we have a King who will reign forever.

We have a Son of David who will never turn aside from the way of his Father.

Therefore, with confidence that the gates of hell will not prevail! –

Go, make disciples of all nations.

Two thousand years later, the words of Jesus have proven to be true.

Disciples of Jesus now live in every nation under heaven.

But we’re not done yet!

Not until we have discipled every nation.