

## Pacesetters Devotional Matthew 28:16-20

*Matthew 28:16* But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated. <sup>17</sup> When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but **some were doubtful**. <sup>18</sup> And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. <sup>19</sup> “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Matthew ends his gospel by recording Jesus’ commission to His disciples – a commission with which most Christians are familiar. During the time between Jesus’ ascension into heaven and His return, He gives His followers the privilege and responsibility to go to people from every ethnic group and tell them the good news about Jesus’ death for their forgiveness, and to help them become His life-long followers.

But have you ever noticed what Matthew says about the spiritual condition of some of Jesus’ disciples when He gave this commission? Yes, they all worshiped the risen Jesus when He appeared to them in Galilee. “But some were *doubtful*.” About what were they doubtful? We can’t be positive about the answer to this question, but exploring the likely answers may provide valuable encouragement to us.

It is unlikely that they were doubtful that Jesus was physically resurrected. Yes, that was their immediate doubt when He appeared to them shortly after they discovered that His tomb was empty. When He appeared to them, they assumed that He was a ghost – so He invited them to touch His body, and He ate fish in their presence (Luke 24:36-43). Yes, because Thomas was not with them on that occasion, he also



doubted until Jesus appeared to Him and settled his doubts in a similar way (John 20:24-28). By the time Jesus appeared to them in Galilee, then, this doubt was most likely resolved.

About what, then, were they doubtful? Consider the following possibilities:

- They may have been doubtful about *the legitimacy of the mission* on which Jesus was sending them. For verses 18-20 were not the first time that the resurrected Jesus gave them this commission. The gospel authors and the book of Acts record it (in various forms) five times. This amount of repetition not only emphasizes its importance; it also suggests the disciples' obtuseness. After all, they had had problems all along with Jesus' insistence that He must be rejected and die. They expected the Messiah to defeat His enemies, not be killed by them. They expected the other ethnic nations to come to Israel, not for them to go to the nations. Right up to the day that Jesus ascended to heaven (*after* this account in Matthew 28), they asked Him: "Is it at this time that You are restoring the kingdom to Israel" (Acts 1:6)?
- They almost certainly had doubts about *their adequacy for this mission*. After all, they had all forsaken Jesus when He was arrested. Peter's boast that He would never forsake Jesus had turned into emphatically denying Him (three times!) just a few hours later. Their egocentric hopes for positions of power in Jesus' kingdom had been crushed by His death. Now that Jesus had conquered death, why wasn't He telling them that *He* would go to every nation and call people to become His disciples? Why was He entrusting His world-wide plan to *them*?
- They probably also had doubts about *the feasibility of this mission because of the implacable hostility of Jesus' enemies*. The Jewish leaders, who had condemned Jesus as a false



teacher, were still very much alive. The Roman rulers, who had carried out Jesus' execution, were still very much in power. Without Jesus' physical presence, what chance would they have to extend His influence? They had no money, no military might, no political influence, and no social popularity. It is likely that at least some of them thought that the whole plan was doomed from the start.

Before we re-consider Jesus' commission to His disciples in light of these doubts, stop for a moment and consider how these same doubts often plague you and me today. Even though I can look back over the past 2000 years and see that Jesus' commission has been substantially fulfilled, I often feel doubtful about my own role in His plan. Why would He choose me, with all of my past failures and present flaws? Is it really true that at least some from every ethnic group will turn to Jesus as their Messiah? Some of them seem to be completely resistant. The rulers of this world are so powerful, and many of them are so evil. Who am I that could subvert their plans and power as Jesus' representative?

Now we can appreciate how Jesus responded to their doubts. He didn't disqualify them because of their doubts; He included them despite their doubts. He was not repelled by their doubts; He drew near to them to minister to their doubts. And this is how He responds to us when we meet with Him beset by doubts and fears concerning His mission.

This is why Jesus bookended His commission with two great promises – promises that were designed to strengthen their faith, and ours. Are we intimidated by our enemies' power and authority? "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth." Jesus' authority will accompany us as we pursue His mission. He will either remove their opposition, or He will work through their opposition to advance His kingdom. Think of Paul's imprisonments. In Philippi, Jesus sent an earthquake to release Paul and give him an opportunity to witness to his jailer (Acts 16:25-30). When Paul was imprisoned as a Roman prisoner, Jesus worked through his imprisonment to spread His good news



through Paul's Roman soldier-guards, and He used Paul's prison letters to convert and build up countless people down through the centuries.

Are we afraid of being forsaken and overwhelmed by our weaknesses? "I am with you always – even to the end of the age." Through His Spirit, Jesus is present with us in a way that is superior to His physical presence during His public ministry (see John 16:7). His Spirit will provide supernatural comfort and encouragement when we suffer (see 2 Corinthians 1:3-5; 7:5,6). His Spirit will provide supernatural love to enable us to forgive our enemies (see Acts 7:54-60). His Spirit will provide supernatural power to speak and act as His representatives (see Acts 1:8). As Corrie Ten Boom said about her ghastly time in a Nazi prison camp because as a Christian she tried to protect Jewish people: "There is no hole so deep that God's love is not deeper still."

*Lord Jesus, thank You that You love me despite my doubts. Thank You that You chose me to represent You despite my doubts. Thank You for Your promises to lead me and be with me as I follow You with all of my flaws. Thank You for how You have proven Your faithfulness to me. Help me to remember Your promises as I follow you today.*

