

MAKING MISSIONARY DISCIPLES IN MATTHEW

During the last two centuries, the Protestant missionary enterprise has often appealed to Matthew's "Great Commission" in order to inspire and shape its outreach to people across the globe. This modern use of the Great Commission to inspire the church in its mission seems in part to reflect why the gospel of Matthew was originally written.¹

Although the Great Commission in Matthew 28:17-20 has been one of the most cited missionary texts in the Bible, it has often been isolated from its immediate context (van Engen 1996:117), from "the gospel of Matthew as a whole" (Bosch 1997:55) and "from the rest of Scripture as well" (Blauw 1962:85-86).²

The Great Commission was not meant to be a mere appendage to the gospel of Matthew but is intimately linked to both the immediate and broader missionary context of the gospel and the rest of Scripture. It serves as an important index to God's whole missionary program which began with Abraham and now climaxes with Christ's command to make disciples of all nations.

The pericope is first linked to its immediate context by Matthew's carefully constructed report of the burial and resurrection of Jesus. The account begins in 27:55-66 with two distinct groups interacting with Pilate concerning the burial of Jesus. Whereas the true disciples composed of Joseph of Arimathea and the women seek permission to bury the body, the chief priests and the Pharisees are the powerful group which plead with Pilate to guard the body.

The contrasting behavior between the two groups continues in 28:1-10 when the women are commissioned by both an angel and Jesus to go and give the disciples the true report about

¹ While it is difficult to understand the total historical environment which guided Matthew to write his gospel, Bosch states that "Matthew wrote as a Jew to a predominantly Jewish Christian community" in order to motivate them towards "a missionary involvement with its environment" (1997:55).

² In contrast to the usual isolation of the Great Commission from its biblical context, Blauw contends that the Commission expresses the continuity of God's universal concern with God promised to bless all the nations through Abraham (1962:19). Bosch argues that the Great Commission is intimately linked with the rest of the book of Matthew (1997:57) and Michael Wilkins has posited that the entire book of Matthew can be viewed as "a manual on discipleship" (1988:162).

the resurrection. In contrast to the commission given Christ’s true disciples, the Pharisees in 28:11-15 bribe their disciples (the guards) to go and spread a false report of the resurrection.

The Great Commission itself is linked to these preceding sections by the transitional verse in 28:16. While most of the disciples positively respond to the report of the women by going to the mountain in Galilee in order to receive the Great Commission from Jesus, some of the disciples “doubted.”³ By linking the comment that the report of the soldiers has continued to “this very day” (28:15) with Christ’s promise that He would be with His church until the “end of the age” (28:20), Matthew has alluded to the continuing opposition that the true disciples of Christ in their mission to make disciples among the nations.⁴

Table 1 gives a summation of how Matthew 28:17-20 is linked to the activities and reports of the burial and resurrection of Jesus.⁵

TABLE 1
THE MISSIONARY CONTEXT OF THE GREAT COMMISSION

Event/Time	Pharisees/Chief Priests	Women/Disciples
The Burial of Jesus	The Pharisees came from Jerusalem. The Pharisees go to Pilate and ask to guard the body of Jesus.	The women came from Galilee. Joseph goes to Pilate and asks to bury the body of Jesus.
The True and False Commissions	The Pharisees instruct the guards to go and spread a false report of the resurrection.	The angel and Jesus instruct the women to go and tell the disciples about the true report of the resurrection.
Forty Days Later and Beyond	The story of a false resurrection is widely spread among the Jews “to this day.” Some doubt Jesus.	The story of the true resurrection is to be spread to all the nations “to the very end of the age.” Many believe Jesus.

³ Perhaps Matthew wants to link these doubting disciples to the attempts by the Pharisees (through their disciples, the soldiers) to discredit the resurrection which in turn would destroy the very foundation of the Great Commission. Whereas the gospel of John uses the story of Thomas to reflect the struggles of present and future communities of disciples to believe in the resurrection, Matthew takes the Pharisees commissioning of the soldiers to spread a false report as the context in which the church must operate in the future.

⁴ Whereas in Matthew’s day the fact of the resurrection might have been clouded by gnosticism, the secularism and higher critical theories of the modern era has cast doubt on the resurrection and by extension on the Great Commission itself.

⁵ Within this framework, van Engen has recognized that the Great Commission is actually part of three commissions given within the last chapter of Matthew (1996:117).

The Great Commission is not only linked to Jesus' death and resurrection but Bosch states "that the entire gospel points to these final verses: all the threads woven into the fabric of Matthew, from chapter 1 onward, draw together here" (1997:57). If the major themes in the Great Commission are to be properly understood, then they must primarily be defined within the gospel of Matthew itself and the rest of Scripture.

Johannes Blauw has argued that God's universal concern and covenant for humankind is established with Abraham through the promise, "in you all the families of the earth will be blessed" (Gen. 12:3).⁶

Here it becomes clear *that the whole history of Israel is nothing but the continuation of God's dealings with the nations, and that therefore the history of Israel is only to be understood from the unsolved problem of the relation of God to the nations* (1962:19, emphasis his).⁷

However, this separation of Israel to become the people of God was never meant to isolate them from the rest of the nations but rather to foster the centripetal movement of the nations to God's people, city and sanctuary. It is not until the Great Commission of Matthew 28:17-20 that the centrifugal aspect of God's universal concern for the nations is expressed, "for it cannot be denied that here, *and for the first time*, the commission is given to go out among the nations" (Blauw 1962:86, emphasis his).⁸

⁶ In the early 1960s Blauw wrote a book entitled, *The Missionary Nature of the Church*, which was commissioned by the World Council of Churches to survey and appraise the recent work in Biblical theology about the nature and necessity of the Church's mission. He begins his survey by saying that "the Old Testament can neither be by-passed nor referred to merely by way of introduction" (1962:15). In this respect, the older literature on the Biblical theology of mission in the Old Testament is "constantly disappointing" (1962:15).

⁷ In this context (cf. the flood, Tower of Babel) of God's universal concern for the nations, "the election of Israel is a matter of divine initiative which has as its goal the recognition of God by all nations over the whole world. The way to this goal is the theocracy of Israel; the means is Israel's separation from the other peoples." (Blauw 1962:24).

⁸ Blauw states that the Great Commission emphasizes the universal lordship of the Risen Christ by using the word "all" four times. Jesus has been given all authority, the disciples are to teach all He has commanded, they are to go out to all the nations and He would be with them always, (Greek: all the days). He concludes by saying that "*the proclamation of the Gospel is thus the proclamation of the Lordship of Christ among the nations*" (1962:84, emphasis his).

Therefore the Great Commission expresses the continuity of God's universal concern which began in the Book of Genesis.⁹ This strong missionary movement is put into effect by the command of the risen Lord to His disciples on a mountain in Galilee. Although it will often be hindered by doubt, both the command and promise of the commission propels and protects his faithful disciples throughout all the nations for all time. As such, the whole foundation of the Great Commission is predicated on both the earthly recognition that Jesus is indeed the Son of God and the heavenly enthronement of Christ as the Son of Man.

Christ's Missionary Authority

As has already been noted in the immediate context of the Great Commission, the disciples of Jesus will be opposed by powerful elements and they will need the fullest authorization in order to faithfully carry out their Lord's command.¹⁰ The divine authority of Jesus as the Son of God is not an idealized element in Matthew but has a clear missional intent. This missionary authority is brought out in the structure of Matthew's gospel itself.

Some scholars in have adopted a threefold division of the gospel based on the formulaic statement "from that time Jesus began" at 4:17 and 16:21.¹¹ Each of these three sections is climaxed by the declaration that Jesus is the Son of God: "this is my Son" (3:17); "you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God" (16:16) and "surely he was the Son of God" (27:54).

Almost in anticipation of the Great Commission, there is a broadening progression of the recognition of the Divine Person of Jesus. What is first declared by the Father at the baptism is

⁹ A further link between the Great Commission and the Old Testament is found in the covenantal formula. Meredith G. Kline states that "the incorporation of disciples into the jurisdiction of the New Covenant by baptismal confession of Jesus Christ as Lord is in clear continuity with the tradition of the initiatory oath of allegiance found" in the Old Testament (1968:80). See also Richard R. De Ridder, (1975:178) for a discussion of the parallel construction of the preamble, demand and promise of the covenants in Genesis 12, 17 and Matthew 28.

¹⁰ "Blauw has pointed out that in all the Gospels the command of Christ is concerned with authority: Matthew emphasizes *royal* authority (28:18-20), Mark, *liberating* authority (16:15-18), Luke, *forgiving* authority (28:44-53); John emphasizes the continuity between Jesus and those sent (20:21)" (De Ridder 1975:183, emphasis his). For a comparison of the New Testament commissions see John D. Harvey (1998:46).

¹¹ The most thorough presentation of this thesis has come from J.D. Kingsbury in his 1975 work entitled: *Matthew: Structure, Christology, Kingdom*. See also David Bauer for an extended discussion of the topic (1988:75-108).

echoed by the Jewish disciple Peter in the midst of Christ's rejection and the Roman centurion at the moment of His death. Thus the way is prepared in Matthew's gospel for Jesus to be proclaimed as the Lord of all the nations in the Great Commission.

In addition to the testimony that Jesus is the "Son of God," there is the important Christological title "Son of Man" that is often mentioned in Matthew and other places. Just as the confession that Jesus was the "Son of God" by others is made in the context of His life and work, this self-designation traces both His humiliation and exaltation.¹²

As the "Son of Man" goes about His mission "He has no place to lay his head" (8:20) and is falsely called "a glutton and a drunkard" (11:19). Jesus tells His disciples that the Son of Man is going to be "betrayed" (17:22; 26:2, 24, 45), "condemned" (20:18) will "suffer" (17:12) and will "give His life as a ransom for many" (20:28).

The title "Son of Man" not only points to Christ's humiliation but His exaltation as well. The Son of Man has authority to forgive sins (9:6) and is "Lord of the Sabbath" (12:8). All the cities of Israel were to be witnessed to (10:23) before the Son of Man would come in the transfiguration (16:28). The transfiguration is a foretaste of the glories awaiting the Son of Man after His resurrection (16:12). The Son of Man will come in great glory (16:27; 24:27-30; 25:31) to reward each person according to what they have done (16:27; 19:28). Therefore, we should always be ready for the coming of the Son of Man (24:44).¹³

Just as the righteous are commended for their ministry towards the lowly (cf. 25:34-40), the Son of Man, who has spent his whole life ministering to the poor, is raised and exalted to be

¹² Of the twenty-eight times Jesus uses the term "Son of Man" to refer to Himself, thirteen deal with His humiliation and suffering while fifteen focus on His divine authority and eschatological exaltation.

¹³ The last two references in Matthew to the Son of Man are particularly significant. In the parable of the sheep and the goats, "all the nations" (cf. Matt. 28:20) are gathered before the Son of Man to be judged. The Son of Man's authority is heightened because He is identified as "the King" (25:34); God is called "my Father" (25:34) and both the righteous and unrighteous address Him as "Lord" (25:37, 44).

the King of kings and Lord of lords. He is then commissioned to go and judge “all the nations” to see whether they have responded to His call to be disciplined.¹⁴

The message is clear. If the disciples want to share in the exalted status of their Lord they must tread the same path of humiliation and service. The path of faithful discipleship is not built upon an arbitrary rule over the unfortunate but rather on a redeemed brotherhood of all humankind based on the life, death and resurrection of the Son of Man.

The Sending of Missionary Disciples

The word “therefore” in Matthew 28:18 directly and intimately “links the announcement of a reality (Jesus’ universal authority) with a solemn challenge: ‘Make disciples.’ If Jesus is indeed Lord of all, this reality just *has* to be proclaimed” (Bosch 1997:78, emphasis his).¹⁵ With a full consciousness of Christ’s missionary authority over all the nations, the disciples are sent on a mission to all the nations.¹⁶

Within the gospel of Matthew there are other commissions given which center around the word “go.” Whereas Herod sends the Magi to Bethlehem to go and make a careful search for the child (2:8), the angel tells Joseph to go and take his family to Egypt (2:20). The centurion understood the imperative “go” (8:9) and Jesus sent John’s disciples back to John to report what they had seen and heard (11:4).

Jesus tells Peter to go fishing to pay the temple tax (17:27) and relates the story about the man who goes and looks for the one lost sheep that has wandered away (18:12). Disciples are sent into the village to find a donkey (21:2) and in the parable of the banquet the servants are told

¹⁴ This whole scenario is depicted in Daniel 7 when the Son of Man is brought before the Ancient of Days to receive all the nations. While the identification with this “son of man” in Daniel has been opened to much conjecture, (Hare, 1990); (Lindars, 1983) and (Higgins 1980), Arthur Ferch concludes that this Danielic figure is, “an individual, eschatological, celestial being with messianic characteristics, distinct from the saints, yet maintaining an intimate relationship with them in the end time” (1979:192). Both Blauw (1962:83) and De Ridder (1975:171) have connected the Great Commission directly with the enthronement of the Son of Man in Daniel 7.

¹⁵ As such the word “therefore” is used fifty-six times in Matthew in the following representative contexts: (cf. 5:45-48; 6:1-2; 7:24-27; 10:16; 12:9-12 and 21:33-41).

¹⁶ The word used here by Matthew means “having gone,” in the sense of “when you go” (De Ridder 1975:184). A clear meaning of the word is made evident in the Lord’s first commissioning of the Twelve in 10:1-2: “Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go preach this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven is near.’”

to “go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you can find” (22:9). The wise virgins tell the other five to go and buy oil for themselves (25:9) and Jesus tells the women to go and quickly tell the disciples (28:7).¹⁷ The word “go” or the phrase “as you go” not only relates to missionary activity but is linked to the patterns of common life. It is within these daily tasks that the Lord urges His followers to make disciples of the nations.

The sending of the disciples can be seen as an apostolic mission. Richard R. De Ridder defines apostleship in the following way:

Apostleship involved commissioning with authority for a specific task in specific areas at a specific time. It included the right to appoint assistants in the work whose authority never exceeded that of the commissioned apostle. Such apostleship was exercised within the limitations of the assignment (1975:148).

After the resurrection, there is a dramatic change in the mission of Jesus. The Apostle who has been commissioned and sent by the Father now sends and commissions other apostles to take up the work of making disciples. “His own mission was completed, and his role changed from sent one to *sender*” (Harvey 1998:44, emphasis his). Just how this discipling of the nations is to take place is brought out in the following discussion.

Making Missionary Disciples in Matthew

The verb “to disciple” occurs only four times in the New Testament with three of them occurring in the book of Matthew.¹⁸ Bosch emphatically states:

The most striking use of the verb *matheteuein* is encountered in the “Great Commission” (28:19). It is also the only instance in which it is used in the imperative sense: *matheteusate*, “make disciples!” It is, moreover, the principal verb in the ‘Great Commission’ and the heart of the commissioning (1997:73).

¹⁷ In the past tense the word is translated “went” and is usually connected to obeying the command to go. After speaking to Herod, the Magi followed His instructions and went on their way (2:9). The disciples went and found the donkey as Jesus had directed them. The Pharisees went and made the tomb secure in harmony with the command of Pilate (27:66) and the disciples went to Galilee as Jesus had instructed them through the women (28:16).

¹⁸ The only non-Matthean verse is found in Acts 14:21 which says, “They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples.” The other times this term appears in Matthew is in the parable of the storehouse (13:51-53) and the stating that Joseph of Arimathea had become a disciple of Jesus (27:57).

If the phrase “make disciples” is the primary element in the final commission it is not surprising then that “disciple” is far more central in Matthew than in the other synoptic gospels.¹⁹ The disciples not only listened to Jesus, they “followed him” (8:23) which demanded denial of self and cross-bearing (16:24). The first time the “twelve” disciples are mentioned is in Matthew 10:1 when Jesus commissions them to go the lost sheep of the house of Israel.²⁰ This marks an important turning point in the focus of the ministry of Jesus. Before this the disciples are only mentioned nine times. From Matthew 10 onwards they are mentioned sixty-one times.²¹

Thus Matthew teaches in the heart of the gospel that the loosely knit band of followers are becoming missionary disciples through an intimate relationship with Him. Disciples were closer to Jesus than his own mother and brothers (12:49) and they often asked him questions in private to gain instruction (13:10; 20:17; 24:3). The disciples helped Jesus in His ministry to the people when they took the loaves from Jesus and fed the 5000 (14:19) and the 4000 (15:36).

The disciples at times also impeded and could not duplicate the missionary discipleship of Jesus as when they urged Jesus to send away the 5000 (14:15); the Canaanite woman (15:23) and the children (19:13). Because of their lack of faith, they could not cast the demon out of a young boy (17:19). The disciples were also slow to understand Jesus’ words regarding the cross (16:21) and after His prediction of their denial (26:35).

The cost of discipleship is emphasized by Simon Peter and Andrew leaving their nets and James and John leaving their boat and father. Jesus teaches that to respond to the call involves

¹⁹ “The term occurs seventy-three times in Matthew, compared to forty-six times in Mark and only thirty-seven times in Luke. It is, in fact the only name for Christ’s followers in the gospels” (Bosch 1997:73). While it could be argued that there were other names for Christ’s followers in the gospels, Matthew does use the term more than Mark and Luke. According to the NIV concordance, the count is Matthew, 70; Mark, 44; Luke, 31; John, 58; and the book of Acts, 24. The epistles do not carry the term.

²⁰ Because of Jesus’ teaching, preaching and healing ministry the crowds follow Him (4:23-25) and increase until they become too large for Jesus Himself to handle (9:35-38). In apparent response to the petition to send out more laborers into His harvest field, the Lord commissions His disciples to go and minister like He had done (10:1-42).

²¹ It is apparent that Jesus chose to focus on the twelve disciples during the very heart of His ministry so that they would be equipped to carry on the word and works of Jesus after the resurrection.

letting the dead bury the dead (8:22) and a cross (10:38; 16:24). Following Jesus will involve a sacrifice of self, a surrender to the will of the Lord that has extended the call.

Discipleship involved acceptance of his authority, inwardly by believing in him and outwardly by obeying him. There is a supremely personal union implied everywhere in the New Testament when the word μαθητης (disciple) is used. There can be nothing in the life of the disciple that is apart from the Lord and his life (De Ridder 1975:186).

Jesus is not content with a mere classroom experience but teaches His disciples as they follow Him. Michael J. Wilkins has observed that the inclusion of the term “disciple” in the gospel stories directly linked them with the instruction of His followers.

Bornkamm establishes that by the inclusion of μαθητης in 8:21,23, the entire pericope was to be considered a “discipleship story,” and if that perspective is kept in mind, one can see that Matthew has transformed many teaching segments into explicit discipleship-teaching pericopae. In approximately seventeen of Matthew’s thirty-four inclusions, the term μαθητης is a signal word to note discipleship instruction (1988:165).

Despite some apprehension by Peter and the disciples when Jesus mentions the cross (16:21-23), the disciples faithfully follow their Lord as He weaves His ministry back and forth between Jerusalem and Galilee. Christ’s prediction of their abandonment of Him is repudiated by Peter and the rest of the disciples (26:33-35). Although their human weakness does prevent them from following Jesus to the cross, they do gather in Galilee as Jesus had promised (26:32) to follow Him again (28:16).

Thus the principles of just how missionary disciples are to be made is constantly unfolded in the first disciples who left all to follow the life and teachings of their Lord. The book of Matthew provides rich resources for the disciples of all ages to discover anew both the meaning and the method of fulfilling the Lord’s commission to go and make disciples of all nations.

The Global Mission of the Disciples

Having been personally discipled by Jesus, the disciples are now prepared to go and disciple the nations. The incorporation of the nations into the express will of God is not a

surprise addendum at the end of the gospel but has been a central theme from the very beginning in the genealogy and Jesus' ministry in "Galilee of the Gentiles."

David Bauer writes that it is through the genealogy the reader is required "to enter the world of Matthew's Gospel by way of the history of Israel, which began with Abraham" (1996:157). In the record of Jesus' ancestry there are liars (Abraham, Jacob); an adulterer and murderer (David) and kings who sacrificed their sons in fire (Ahaz, Manasseh).²²

However, it was not only for these sinful Jewish people that Jesus came as God's missionary disciple to save. For included in the genealogy of "His people" (cf. 1:21) are three Gentile women of questionable repute (Tamar, Uriah's wife and Rahab) and the widowed Moabite woman Ruth. By specifically including the four Gentile women, the gospel from its very beginning embraces the nations and the marginalized within the arms of God's love.

In addition to the inclusion of the Gentile women in the genealogy, the geographical area where Jesus both began and ended his ministry is specifically mentioned as "Galilee of the Gentiles" (4:15, cf. Isa. 9:1).²³ According to Paul Hertig, "Galilee means 'ring' or 'circle' because of the surrounding Gentile nations which pressed" around the northern province of Israel (1995:136). Hence the term "portrays the wholistic and universal mission of the Messiah" (1995:ii). In order to disciple the nations, "one will have to pass Israel's boundaries consciously and intentionally to be able to fulfill the order" (Blauw 1962:86).

Seen in the light of Christ's position of authority over all things (in heaven and earth) a positive attitude towards "all nations" has come into being that overshadows anything negative may have been said about the nations. This positive relationship has been given character and meaning by the order "make them into disciples of mine" (Blauw 1962:86).

Just as Jesus had come to save "His people" as illustrated in the genealogy, He now commissions the disciples to make missionary disciples of the nations. They are to do this

²² "Matthew suggests that this kind of moral and religious failure characterized the entire period and led finally to the destruction of the monarchy with the Deportation" (Bauer 1996:146).

²³ Because the primary trade route between Egypt and the Mesopotamian valley passed along Israel's coast and through Galilee at that time there were many foreigners present in Northern Israel.

through the baptizing, teaching and sending of others into the harvest field until the very end of time. Like themselves, the nations are now called upon to leave all and come under the authority of the risen and exalted Lord.

Baptizing and Teaching Missionary Disciples

While the previous sections linked the authority of Jesus to *what* the disciples were to do, this section discusses *how* the disciples are to reproduce their missionary discipleship through “the two modal participles ‘baptizing’ and ‘teaching’” which “are clearly subordinate” to *matheteusate* and describes “the form the disciple-making is to take” (Bosch 1983:230).

In quoting Gerhard Friedrich, Bosch underlines the fact that baptism in Matthew is in itself missional in nature and equated with call: “The sequel ‘baptizing’ and ‘teaching’ is not doctrinal oversight but consciously chosen by Matthew. Through baptism people are called into becoming disciples of Jesus” (Friedrich 1983:182 as quoted in Bosch 1997:79).

The whole concept of missionary discipleship in the Great Commission and the book of Matthew is under the umbrella of the authority of Jesus who is affirmed that He is “Lord.” The whole focus of both the baptism and teaching elements of making missionary disciples is to call all the nations under the Lordship of the Risen and exalted Christ who will then be sent to bring others under Christ’s missionary authority.

The participles “baptizing” and “teaching” describe the way by which disciples are made. The believers are commissioned to make disciples *by* baptizing men and putting them under instruction Baptism is the sign of consecration and discipleship in the New Covenant. Its meaning is life, the new life, that has been made possible by their participation in the death and resurrection of Christ. Matthew 28:19 means consignment under the authority of Christ” (De Ridder 1975:190, emphasis his).²⁴

In other words, conversion is the first and most essential step in the process of making disciples. The inward work of the Spirit is outwardly demonstrated by the new life in Christ.

²⁴ In the discussion of readiness for baptism, De Ridder makes a most cogent comment: “The Head of the new body is Christ who is confessed as its Lord. Therefore, in its mission the Church requires the confession of that Lordship before it administers the sign and seal of covenantal incorporation” (1975:193).

The person has a new Lord, a new life and a new capacity to know, understand and obey the teachings of Christ.²⁵

Just what areas of the life needs to be brought under the whole realm of the Lordship of Christ is abundantly taught in Matthew. This instruction of disciples in the ways of the Lord will be, “by no means a merely intellectual enterprise (as it often is for us and was for the ancient Greeks). Jesus’ teaching is a call for a concrete decision to follow him and to submit to God’s will” (Bosch 1997:66).²⁶

Since missionary disciples are sent into the world, this becomes the arena of their teaching and discipling activities.²⁷ This is shown in the gospel Matthew itself where the teaching takes place both within the discourse and the narrative material.²⁸ As such, Matthew has arranged the discourses of Jesus into five major addresses which some have described as “Matthew’s ‘Pentateuch’” (Bosch 1997:69).²⁹

In this chiasmic structure shown in Figure 1, Jesus’ own baptism which initiated His missionary discipleship is paralleled by the command to baptize the nations. The blessing of true discipleship in Matthew 5-7 is contrasted with the curse of false discipleship in Matthew 23-25. Finally, the parables of missionary discipleship of Matthew 13 is bracketed by the mission of the disciples in Matthew 10 and ministry of the disciples in Matthew 18.

²⁵ Because of a superficial understanding of the Great Commission command to “baptize” the church has at times added members without the benefit of a deep conversion or a thorough grounding in the Christian life. A greater understanding of the theology of baptism within the framework of the Great Commission and Scripture would go a long way in producing more mature disciples for the kingdom.

²⁶ “Whereas ‘all nations’ indicates the extensive area of authority of the exalted Lord, ‘all that I have commanded you’ contains a reference to the intensive range of authority: *all* life and the whole man is claimed by Christ” (Blauw 1962:87, emphasis his).

²⁷ “The context of this is not the classroom (where ‘teaching’ usually takes place for us), nor even the church, but the world” (Bosch 1997:67).

²⁸ According to Michael Wilkins, Matthew uses the word “disciples” as a “signal word to specify a certain teaching as a discipleship teaching. Matthew has created a literary device to show the way Jesus has taught his disciples and to show how that teaching can relate to his church” (1988:222).

²⁹ The discourses are linked to the surrounding narratives by the same connecting phrase “When Jesus had finished saying these things” (cf. 7:29; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1).

Baptism of Jesus

Baptism of Nation

Blessings of True Discipleship

Curses of False Discipleship

Mission of Apostles

Ministry of Apostles

Parables

BAPTISM AND MAJOR DISCOURSES IN MATTHEW

FIGURE 1

The Presence of Jesus in Missionary Discipleship

The Great Commission ends with the promise: “and surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (28:20). Immanuel’s promised presence with His people at the beginning of Matthew’s gospel (cf. 1:23) is now specifically directed and provided for those who have joined Him in missionary discipleship.

The expression “with you” and “the close of the age” are typically Matthean. Once again, as he so often does in this final pericope, Matthew reaches back to themes he has developed in the earlier part of his gospel. In the case of “I am with you” he takes up the words from Isaiah 7:14, which he has used in chapter 1:23, “And his name shall be called Immanuel (which means, God with us)” (Bosch 1997:77).

Christ’s authority is universal in both place (“heaven and earth” 28:18) and time (“always” 28:20). “After the proclamation and the commandment, the promise now follows. The presence of Christ is *the* great gift to His disciples. The promise of the presence is the fulfillment—but now for all nations—of the promise expressed in the name Yahweh (Exod. 3)” (Blauw 1962:87, emphasis his).³⁰

The last words of Jesus in the book of Matthew not only expresses the continuing presence of Christ with His missionary disciples but also places all their work within an eschatological context.³¹ The promise of Christ’s presence at the end of the Great Commission

³⁰ When the Lord God appeared to Moses at the burning bush, He sought to reassure him by saying “I will be with you” (Exod. 3:12). Now the incarnate Son of God stands before His disciples and extends the same promise to His disciples who are about to be sent out to proclaim a new spiritual exodus to all the nations.

³¹ “Therefore the attributes of discipleship are not only obedience to His command to proclamation, baptism and instruction to all nations, but *also* orientation to the consummation of the world as the last and deepest goal of Christ’s work” (Blauw 1962:87, emphasis his).

not only is meant to constantly empower and comfort the disciples but direct them to the reality of the final consummation.

From the genealogy to the Great Commission, the missionary authority and discipleship of Christ has been the focus of Matthew's gospel. As the gospel has progressed through the narratives and discourses a profound change has taken place.

Both the genealogy and the missionary commissioning focus upon Christ, thus pointing to the gospel's primary emphasis on Christology. In the entry frame of the genealogy we encounter the voice of the narrator, which will be the predominant and determining voice as we travel through the narrative world of the Gospel. But in the exit frame of the missionary commissioning we encounter not the voice of the narrator, but the voice of Jesus; in this way Matthew indicates that the predominant and determining voice in the real world of post-Easter discipleship is the exalted and ever-present Christ (Bauer 1996:158-159).

In a very real way, Christ is still speaking today through His church as we seek to join the women on that first Eastern morn to proclaim the reality of His resurrection. As we go about our daily tasks, the nations are encountered and opportunities are given to convert and bring others under the loving Lordship and teachings of Christ. As we contemplate His mission, may we often tarry with the disciples upon that mountain in Galilee to regain anew a deeper sense of His promised presence as we go forth and make disciples of all nations.