

# The King's Final Orders

## The Great Commission and the Kingdom of God

*Matthew 28:16-20*

### The Context

Jesus has risen from the dead. His disciples have seen his resurrection power in a new way – the One who raised others has now been raised. If they believed Jesus before, now they believe *in* Jesus. He's alive!

He's graced them with more teaching and more fellowship. Now Jesus is ready to return to the Father. His ascension to heaven is an under-celebrated miracle in today's church and represents still more reason to revere our Savior.

### The Content

***“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”***

This extraordinary statement would be gallish from any other source. Coming from Jesus, this is imaginable. No more subdued hinting at authority. No cryptic stories of kings going and coming again. “I am the King,” says Jesus, not for the first time. “I am the king over all nations of authority.” That might be news, even for those who watched Jesus calm stormy seas.

While Matthew's gospel is the only one to record this saying, it is not the only gospel to superimpose the supremacy of Christ's rulership. John's gospel says the same thing in a dozen ways, and earns the privilege of being the one gospel that is most often edited out by those who are squeamish about giving Jesus supreme authority. In the same way, people who paint Jesus as nothing more than a moral teacher and societal advocate won't give this passage much credence. “All authority?” they might ask. “Jesus wouldn't say that.” Or else they might parse the meaning in a way that suggests that “all of us have such authority and that Jesus was the first and best at claiming this birthright available to all humankind,” or something like that.

I'm more traditional and literal in my reading. I believe that Jesus really claims authority – heavenly and earthly. He is the king of all reality, and knows it well. In these last moments before departure, he wants everyone else to know. It might sound gallish for Jesus to say this, but it feels more gallish for me to doubt him.

### Go

Jesus has modeled disciple making. He has coached his early disciples in their first efforts at disciple making. Now he is entrusting the entire enterprise over to them and those who follow after.

He says, “Go.” This suggests that making disciples requires volition, traction, intention. Some scholars make the point that the Greek word for “go” can be interpreted “as you go” or “while you are going” perhaps leaving room for a more passive, along-the-way approach to disciple making. If that were the best interpretation of the word, then a dozen best translations by the top scholars in the world would have used it. And whenever I hear people point out that potential translation, the effort is coupled with an argument for short-changing our evangelical mission. It’s almost as if people are looking for justification for being less bold or intentional.

Obviously, not all will be missionaries in the classic sense, going to faraway lands to preach the gospel. Most of us will be missionaries and ambassadors for Christ to the ordinary streams and eddies of life. So if it helps to say, “As you go, make disciples . . . ,” fine. As long as we know this: Our mission is to make disciples, wherever and however we go.

### ***Make Disciples***

How do we make disciples? The confluence of teachings can be summed up like this: with words and deeds, make the message of Jesus clear. As people become curious, reveal the true nature of Christ and appeal for his kingship. We can’t *make* anyone accept Jesus for who he is, but we can participate in the exposure and mentoring of people with emerging faith in Jesus. They become, like us, apprentices of the Master. We are ambassadors for the King, working a remote outpost where heaven’s values are life-giving and world-changing. As people are introduced to Christ, open hearts will embrace him. Then we stimulate one another to grow up in Christ in every way and to live the Christ life for a needy world.

“What if I’m shy about sharing my faith?” Live your faith. Pray for opportunities to declare a reason for your hopes – opportunities that feel natural, not contrived. And pray for courage and the Holy Spirit’s help for those moments.

“Don’t some have the gift of evangelism?” Probably, but everyone is on this mission – making disciples.

“Who’s going to disciple my children? The youth pastor?” I’m sure the youth pastor wants to help. But what is parenting if it isn’t discipling? I have no idea why this isn’t a widely held notion, but it should be. I want my children to know, love and follow Jesus more than anything else by far. Again, this means volition, traction, intention. As they *grow*, make disciples of all the children.

### ***Of All Nations***

Jesus wants the gospel to go out in all directions to every *ethne*, or people group. He is the answer for every person in every culture on every continent. Jesus is not the Western Brand Religion. Jesus didn’t say that and we shouldn’t. (He was Eastern, of course, not Western!) Jesus is not “our best guess at a good philosophical guide that shouldn’t be foisted on others.” No. As C.S. Lewis and others declare, Jesus is either a liar, or a lunatic, or Lord. If Jesus isn’t Lord, then so many of his claims paint the picture

of a sociopathic liar with a superiority complex. That explanation simply doesn't match up with the heart and greater portion of Jesus' life and teaching. Who Jesus was validates who he is. And if Jesus is king, Jesus actually is Son of God, King of Kings, and all authority in heaven and earth belongs to him.

So the gospel is for all people. We don't need to be ashamed to spread the word. Aren't you glad someone spread the word to you? Aren't you glad they crossed mountains and borders and oceans? I am.

### **Baptizing Them in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit**

Baptism is the outward expression of an inward reality. – new life and immersion in that new life. This is the threshold act for every believer into the household of the faithful. Jesus teaches us to be baptized and to baptize. His seriousness should be understood by the fact that these words were spoken among his parting commission.

Can someone be Christian without being baptized? Probably, though it is a complex argument. The better question is this: Why be Christian without being baptized when it was obviously important to Jesus?

### **Teaching Them to Observe (Obey) All I've Commanded**

This is the essence of disciple-making, once people sign on as Christ's followers and apprentices. We learn and teach and teach and learn. We model and mentor and instruct and read and drill and appeal and stimulate and encourage and coach and catalyze and inspire and correct and exhort and confront – whatever makes learning and growth happen.

### **This is our Great Commission**

We put it right up there with the Great Commandment and the Golden Rule. These are our marching orders and our reason for being and doing. Not some of us. All of us.