



Developing Disciples Matthew 28:18-19 January 6, 2019

In order to be a healthy group of disciples (a church), one of the most important things is make the most important thing the most important thing. And you can help! But first we need clarity about what the most important thing is.

There are several different ways of stating the most important thing. In Matthew 28 it is to “make disciples” (v. 19). The reason this passage qualifies for telling us the most important thing is these are Jesus’ final instructions to his followers. What’s more, the instructions are directly connected to Jesus being the ultimate authority in the universe (v. 18), by means of the word “therefore” (v. 19). “Make disciples” is clearly the key part, since it is the only word (one word in Greek) in the passage whose grammatical form is a command. The prominence of making disciples also makes sense due to the fact that it encompasses so many of the other things that are elsewhere said to be important, like trust, love, worship, service, obedience, community, teaching, and many others.

A disciple is a student or learner. But since Jesus is not only teaching doctrine but also lifestyle, we must not think of this merely as acquiring information. Rather, a disciple is to be taught to obey everything Jesus commanded (v. 20). Hence, “follower” is a pretty good way to translate the word. So, in Matthew 28, the most important thing is for us to help people look to Jesus to learn how to live their lives.

Making disciples is here said to consist of baptizing people and teaching them. Clearly some teaching is needed before a person gets baptized as well (Acts 14:21). But once a person knows who Jesus is, the meaning of his death and resurrection, and is ready to follow him, they are

baptized and become his disciples. This happened often even during Jesus’ lifetime, though we aren’t always aware of it (John 4:1-2). Yet as all four Gospels show, and as Jesus states overtly in Matthew 28, much more teaching is needed after one has been baptized as a disciple of Jesus. It is incumbent on us to teach new disciples to obey all that Jesus taught (v. 19). Unfortunately, we have often blatantly ignored Jesus’ words about this.

The words “all nations” are also key. Though Jesus served some Gentiles, the primary focus of his ministry was Jewish people. But then, in Matthew 28, he commissioned his followers to make disciples of all nations. Thus the word “go” (v. 19). International missions will always be a part of our ministry at NorthWest, and the healthier we are here the better we can do this. At the same time, the US is also one of the nations, and many people here also need to become his disciples too. The diverse population in San Antonio provides us with an additional opportunity to make disciples of the nations. Again, all races, ethnicities, and nationalities are welcome at NorthWest. Thus we can make disciples of all nations both locally and internationally.

Jesus also says he will be with us to the end of the age on this mission (v. 20). We are not working alone. In fact, it is not even our mission—it’s his. We are following and honoring him by serving in various ways in the vital work of making disciples. We trust him to guide us and work through us, by the power of His Spirit. We demonstrate our trust by humility, looking to Him for guidance and praying to Him often.

The leadership of NorthWest wants this to be our new vision at NorthWest. We don’t have a vision in order to be trendy but to help us focus us on what matters most. We are going to state it as Developing Disciples of Jesus, to remind us that our work includes both making new disciples and developing those of us who already are. Since disciples of Jesus learn to love like Jesus, the former vision is still very relevant. Over the next few weeks, we will make the vision more visual and learn ways we can participate in it. The current adult classes provide an additional opportunity for discussing the vision with others. Hopefully the time and attention we give to our new vision will help us embrace it fully so that NorthWest will be a healthier congregation, pleasing to God, and nourishing to us all.

