

## Bible Study 59 God’s Challenge

BY BOB UTLEY

Read Matthew 28:16-20.

To whom was Jesus speaking? \_\_\_\_\_

Write Jesus’ instructions in your own words:

What promise did Jesus make? \_\_\_\_\_

This well-known text is often called “The Great Commission,” but it seems that for too many believers it is the “good suggestion” directed to specially called and trained leaders. This text, like so many passages in the Bible, is often misunderstood for several reasons: 1) We do not read the entire context. 2) We have a pre-understanding about the audience to whom it is addressed. 3) We use it only for evangelism.

Notice that the paragraph actually begins in verse 16. At first glance, it may appear that only the eleven apostles received this worldwide commission. But we must consider the greater context.

Before His death, what did Jesus tell His disciples in the upper room? (Matthew 26:32) \_\_\_\_\_

After His resurrection, what instructions did the women receive? (Matthew 28:7,10) \_\_\_\_\_

It is important to note that all of Jesus’ followers were given the invitation and instruction to meet with Him in Galilee. Notice in verse 17 that upon seeing Jesus, “some worshiped” and “some doubted.” Some doubted? It seems surprising because, by this time, all the apostles and the 120 believers assembled in the upper room had seen Jesus. He had appeared to them three Sunday nights in a row in the upper room. (By the way, this set the precedent for believers to worship on Sundays.) But remember, Jesus looked a little different after the resurrection!

Read John 20:14-16 and Luke 24:13-31.

When did Mary Magdalene recognize the risen Jesus? \_\_\_\_\_

When Jesus appeared to the two on the road to Emmaus, at what point did they recognize Him? \_\_\_\_\_

So what does Matthew 28:17 imply? That the group addressed in the Great Commission was larger than just the apostles! In fact, this meeting on the mountain in Galilee may be the one described in 1 Corinthians 15:6.

According to this verse, how many followers did Jesus appear to at one time? \_\_\_\_\_

If this is the attended meeting, it establishes a very important truth: The mandate from the resurrected Lord was not addressed to leaders only but to all disciples! We must rid ourselves of the unbiblical notion that God calls some to a special elite group. In the New Testament, whenever the Greek words “cleros” or “laos” are used (from which we get the English terms “clergy” and “laity”), they always refer to the entire body of believers. We are all called, gifted and sent! This means every believer, not just the pastor, church staff or deacon body, is commanded to go and make disciples.

You might say, “Not me. I am too young, too shy, too afraid!” So were the early disciples. These words of Jesus must have terrified them. After all, they were Jews. They believed that Gentiles were unclean, unloved and unaccepted. But now the Gentiles were included in God’s message of forgiveness.

Reread Matthew 28:16-20. The One who has “*all authority in heaven and on earth*” (v. 18) is the One who sends us and has promised to be with us (v. 20). It is His work and His power that will accomplish the task. You and I must only be available.

Finally, realize that this text has two emphases:

1. Make disciples.
2. Make disciples.

Yes, it’s the same command, but in two senses. The first has to do with becoming a Christian. Notice it says “make disciples” not “make a decision.” There is a real difference between the two. One is a relationship of growing trust and service; the other is an action in the past. Salvation is not a product (i.e., a ticket to heaven or a fire insurance policy). It is a growing, daily relationship with Jesus.

The second part is crucial. As Christians, we are commanded to not only share the gospel with unbelievers (v. 19), but also to take the time to share with them all that Jesus has shared with us. The Great Commission is not fulfilled until new believers are mature, functioning, reproducing, serving believers themselves.

We do a better job in focusing on verse 19, but we’ve done a poor job in fulfilling verse 20! Making disciples is not the special, unusual assignment for an elect few; it’s the normal assignment for us all!

The mandate from the resurrected Lord was not addressed to leaders only but to all disciples! ... We are all called, gifted and sent!