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In this third study of the four under the theme “Approaching a Missional Mindset” in the Symth-Helwys Formations study guides, the emphasis is upon “Being the Presence of Christ.” For Baptists especially, [Matt. 28:16-20](#) is probably the best known passage in the entire Gospel of Matthew outside of the Sermon on the Mount in chapters 5-7. Our heritage for the past century plus has been to be mission minded. Countless amounts of effort and money have been poured into spreading the gospel of Christ around the world. This series of studies attempts to reinforce that tradition among mainstream Baptists who are attempting to carry on that missionary tradition in the twenty-first century. In an increasingly global oriented culture, the tendency at times is ironically toward isolationism. Often this reaction to a shrinking world is encouraged by the mega-church which tends to focus inwardly on massive buildings, programs and budgets. A careful study of scripture is the best remedy for these unbiblical tendencies.

[Matthew 28:16-20](#) is one of the more important passages as a part of the underpinning of a missionary mindset. Several other passages would of necessity be a part of a study developing a “theology of missions.” But in this study, we take a glimpse into one of those, which has a more generalized, all inclusive focus on missions and evangelism.



I. **Context**

Since this study continues a series in the gospel of Matthew, we will use relevant material from those studies in this section.

a. **Historical**

External History. The external history regarding the composition of the Matthean gospel is the first matter of importance. F.C. Grant in the *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (iPreach) provides some helpful summary of this matter:

Hence the background of Matthew must be sought in some area where Judaism and early Christianity

still overlapped, were in close contact--and in conflict. The area which best suits these requirements is probably N Palestine or Syria, perhaps Antioch; and the date, some time after the fall of Jerusalem in 70--probably a considerable time after this date, when apocalyptic eschatology has had a long enough period to decline and revive again--as in IV Ezra and II Baruch. A. H. McNeile and others have dated the book be-

tween 70 and 115, when Ignatius of Antioch apparently quotes the gospel, or at least is familiar with traditions which Matthew also uses. E.g., his Letter to the Ephesians, ch. 19, seems to show acquaintance with Matthew's birth narrative, though with a difference--including midrashic elements very like those in Matthew.

Early church tradition connected this gospel document with Matthew, who was one of the original Twelve Apostles of Christ. Nothing inside the document identifies the writer by name, so our assessment of who wrote this gospel depends upon emerging Roman Catholic tradition beginning in the late second century. The impression one gains from a careful study of the contents of the document suggests a writer very knowledgeable of Jewish concerns and rather skilled in patterns of scribal argumentation, a certain style of ancient Jewish midrashic thought development. The person named Matthew shows up only five times in the New Testament, and may possibly be identified under a more Jewish name, Levi, which is the person identified in five of the nine New Testament references to the name Levi. The difficulty of this internal profile, with connecting it to the person named Matthew and/or Levi, is that this person was a tax collector who essentially worked for the Roman government in Palestine and would have clearly been on the fringes of Jewish religious life, not closely involved in it to have gained the necessary training to be able to make skilled scribal arguments, such as are found in the first gospel. Additionally, Matthew was an eye-witness of the things Jesus both said and did, but the first gospel is not written from an eye-witness perspective. It borrows heavily upon the gospel of Mark and from another major source, usually labeled Q after the German word *Quelle* meaning source. Thus many have questioned the accuracy of the early church tradition that links the writer of the first gospel with the disciple of Jesus. This uncertainty does not, in my estimation, cast doubt on the trustworthi-



<http://www.keyway.ca/htm2002/index.htm>

ness or importance of this gospel document. Instead, it merely indicates that the compositional history of Matthew's gospel has large gaps in it that cannot be filled in apart from reasoned deductions from the existing data. And not all of the gaps can be even deduced and must be left blank.

Internal History. The time and space markers in this passage are relatively simple. They are set up in verses 16-18. Jesus' appearance to the disciples took place on a mountain in the Roman province of Galilee. The

disciples traveled there, as did also Jesus separately, after his resurrection in Jerusalem. The disciples arrived and then Jesus met them. The distance from Jerusalem to Galilee was over 60 miles in a straight arrow direction. Walking on foot would have taken several days to have made the trip. If they followed the tradition Jewish route by crossing over to the east side of the Jordan River before heading north and then crossing back over to the west side of the Jordan where the Sea of Galilee empties into the river, the trip would have been upwards of a hundred miles.

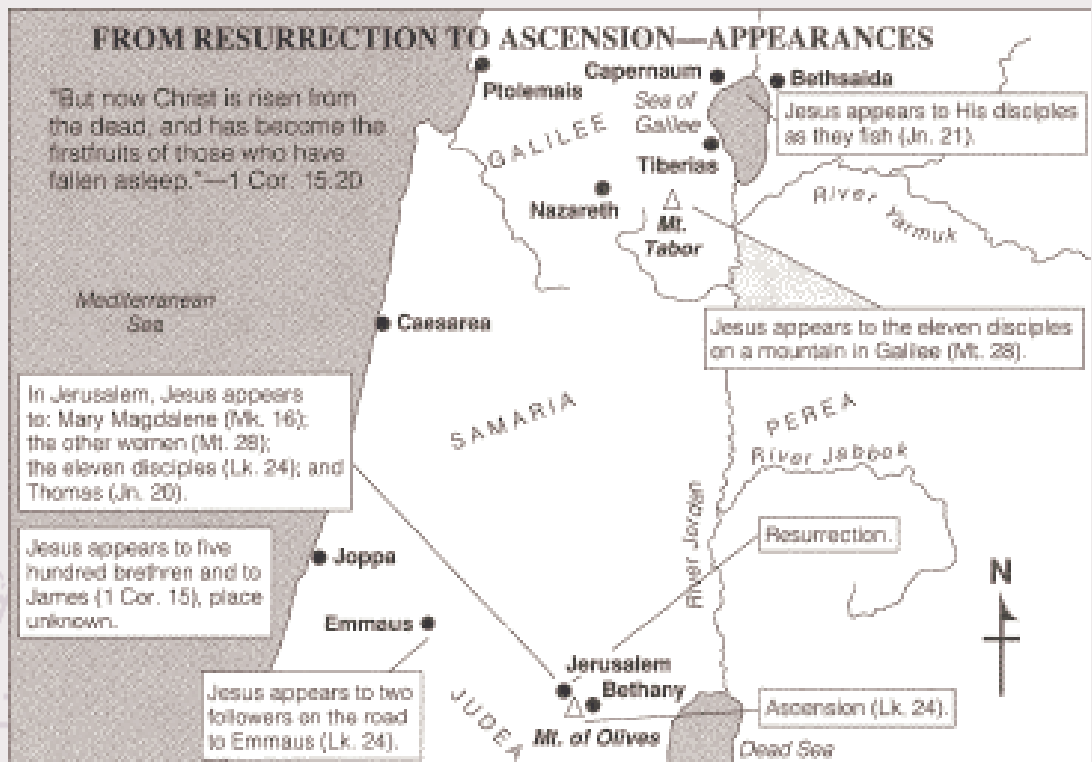
Although Matthew moves in his narrative directly from the empty tomb to the appearance in Galilee, with only the interruption of the soldiers report of the empty tomb in 28:11-15, one must give some consideration to the other gospel accounts and the other resurrection appearances, some taking place in Jerusalem and some in Galilee. Eight appearances to the Twelve, not counting those to the women at the empty tomb, are described in the four gospels and Paul mentions four additional appearances in 1 Cor. 15:5-7: to Cephas, to the Twelve, to 500 brethren, and to James. He then adds the appearance of the ascended Christ to himself on the Damascus road encounter (15:8). According to Acts 1:3, these all took place over a forty day period between his crucifixion and ascension: "After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about

the kingdom of God.”

Thus the question arises as to when in this 40 day time line did Matthew’s account take place. Because of the absence of any direct signal of time between resurrection Sunday and the appearance in Galilee in Matthew’s account, no clear answer to this question can be determined.

Comparing the various accounts, it appears that some appearances occurred on the first Sunday (Lk. 24:13-35 [afternoon; Emmaus road]; Lk 24:36-43 // possibly Jn 20:19-23 [evening; Jerusalem; Thomas absent]) and subsequent days afterward (Jn. 20:24-29 [eight days later; Thomas present]). This was followed by appearances in Galilee (Mt. 28:16-20 [on a mountain] and Jn. 21:1-23 [by the Sea of Tiberias]). Finally, an appearance and the ascension took place at the end of the 40 days back in Jerusalem (Lk. 24:44-53 // Acts 1:1-11). This would suggest that the Galilean appearances took place somewhere in the middle of that time line. Exactly when cannot be determined.

Matthew has prepared his readers to expect this Galilean meeting when, at the empty tomb, first the angel said to the women (28:7): “He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.” This is my message for you.” Then, as they were leaving the area of the tomb, they met Jesus himself who also told them (28:10): “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.” These instructions only indicate that Galilee is the appointed meeting place. Mt. 28:16 specifies that a certain mountain in Galilee was the precise location that Jesus had previously set up. The disciples had no problem finding the moun-



tain, suggesting that they were familiar with the location.

The precise location of the mountain where the meeting took place is unknown. Traditionally, it has been identified with Mt. Tabor in southwestern Galilee as suggested on the above map, but this has no concrete basis with factual evidence. Of the several instances where mountains play in important role in Jesus’ ministry in Matthew’s gospel (4:8; 5:1; 8:1; 14:23; 15:29; 17:1, 9, 20; 18:12; 21:21; 24:16; 28:16) none is ever identified by name. Thus, one is pushed to the conclusion that mountains mostly play a symbolic role for Matthew. What becomes clear is that they help link Jesus to Moses in Matthew’s intentional comparison of divine revelation coming through Jesus as superior, but continuous with that which came through Moses. In our passage, just as Moses delivered his farewell speech to the Israelites on a mountain, so does Jesus. The difference is that Moses instruction was for the covenant people to go into Canaan and rout out the existing people in a conquest of the Promised Land. Jesus, however, instructs his disciples to spread the good news of God’s salvation that includes all peoples of the world.

b. Literary

The various literary considerations for our passage play an unusually important role in making sense of the passage.

Literary Genre. The literary passage of 28:16-20 has been assessed in several different ways over the past several centuries. Davies and Allison (*In-*

ternational Critical Commentary) summarizes these attempts:

Matthew's conclusion, according to Michel (v), follows the pattern of an ancient Near Eastern enthronement ritual: Jesus receives (i) authority, (ii) lordship, and (iii) universal recognition (cf. Dan 7:13–14; Phil 2:9–11).

Jeremias (v) offers a related analysis: (i) exaltation, (ii) presentation or proclamation, (iii) enthronement or acclamation (cf. 1 Tim 3:16; Heb 1:5–14). Lohmeyer, *Matthäus*, p. 416, citing Deut 6:4–5, finds a different scheme: (i) word of revelation (v. 18), (ii) commissioning (vv. 19–20a), (iii) promise (v. 20b). Compare Trilling, *Israel*, pp. 33–4, who claims that the form (that of the MT's *Gottesrede*) is more accurately (i) word of revelation, (ii) command, (iii) promise. But Malina (v) and Frankemölle, pp. 46–61, find the closest parallel in 2 Chr 36:23. The former, who also compares Gen 45:9–11, discerns the pattern of a royal decree: (i) message formula (v. 18a), (ii) narration (v. 18b), (iii) command or summons (vv. 19–20a), (iv) motivation (v. 20b). The latter claims that 28:16–20 fits the covenant formula isolated by K. Baltzer: (i) preamble (vv. 16–17), (ii) prehistory and conferral of power (v. 18), (iii) statement of relation or obligation (v. 19a), (iv) specific commands (vv. 18b–20a), (v) blessing (v. 20b). More satisfying is Hubbard's proposal that our text exhibits the form of OT commissioning narratives: (i) introduction, (ii) confrontation, (iii) reaction, (iv) commission, (v) protest (absent from Matthew), (vi) reassurance, (vii) conclusion.¹ Yet one more suggestion comes from Reedy (v): 28:16–20 is 'a slightly expanded chreia' with this structure.



The most helpful and more accurate assessment of literary genre is that of a commissioning narrative set forth by Hubbard. What we see in 28:16–20 is a “passing of the torch” from Jesus to the Twelve. Just as Jesus had been given a divine mission to accomplish on earth, now those

disciples of Jesus were being given a divine mission: to make disciples of all humankind.

Literary Setting. The climatic role of 28:16–20 has been well summarized by Donald Hagner (*Word Biblical Commentary*):

These final five verses not only conclude the passion-resurrection narrative of chaps. 26–28 but also serve as the conclusion to the entire Gospel. According to Brooks this pericope is basic to the narrative framework of the entire Gospel since it stresses authority and teaching—emphases found in every section of the Gospel.

Thus, 28:16–20 is more than a conclusion, more than a summary, more than a glimpse into Matthew's heartbeat, and that of Jesus himself. It is all these and more. The focus of the first gospel has largely been on Jesus' ministry to the Jewish people. Every now and then glimpses of a larger target audience have surfaced. But in this final, commissioning narrative what has been implicit becomes explicit: God's redemption through Jesus is not just for Jews. Rather, it encompasses all humankind. Those Jewish followers of Jesus who are left behind are now responsible to carry that message to the entire world.

II. Message

Internal Literary Structure. The thought organization for Mt. 28:16–20 is relatively simple, and is set forth in the [Block Diagram](#), [Semantic Diagram](#), and [Exegetical Outline](#) of the passage in the larger internet version of this study. These depict visually the idea-structure of each core expression and then the relationship of each core expression to the entire pericope.

The passage revolves around actions of the disciples preparing themselves to hear Jesus' commissioning of them as his final action on earth, in Matthew's presentation. That twofold structure will be followed in our study of the passage.

a. Meeting Jesus, vv. 16–17

Greek NT

<28:16> Οἱ δὲ ἑνδεκά
μαθηταὶ ἐπορεύθησαν εἰς
τὴν Γαλιλαίαν εἰς τὸ ὄρος

NASB

16 But the eleven
disciples proceeded to
Galilee, to the mountain

NRSV

16 Now the eleven
disciples went to Galilee,
to the mountain to which

NLT

16 Then the eleven
disciples left for Galilee,
going to the mountain

οὗ ἐτάξατο αὐτοῖς ὁ
Ἰησοῦς, <28:17> καὶ
ιδόντες αὐτὸν
προσεκύνησαν, οἱ δὲ
ἐδίστασαν.

which Jesus had design-
ated. 17 When they saw
Him, they worshiped
Him; but some were
doubtful.

Jesus had directed them.
17 When they saw him,
they worshiped him; but
some doubted.

where Jesus had told
them to go. 17 When
they saw him, they wor-
shiped him – but some
of them still doubted!

Notes:

Matthew quickly sets up the scene with only the barest of details. For him, the words of Jesus are the most important aspect of this commissioning narrative. Consequently, we don't have any mentioning of the travel logistics involved for either Jesus or the Eleven disciples in arriving at this designated place of meeting.

The assumption that one has to make for an examination of the other narratives is that the disciples were still in Jerusalem prior to this meeting in Galilee. Matthew simply says that they “[went to Galilee](#)” (ἐπορεύθησαν εἰς τὴν Γαλιλαίαν). This would have involved a several day journey by foot. The time of this is unclear; see the [Internal History](#) section at the beginning for more details. Nothing is ever mentioned in any of the gospel accounts about how the resurrected Jesus moved about. The various narratives simply present him as appearing out of nowhere with the ability to penetrate closed doors if needed.

The location of the meeting in Galilee was “[the mountain where Jesus had commanded](#)” (εἰς τὸ ὄρος οὗ ἐτάξατο αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς). Interestingly, all that we as readers are provided regarding Jesus’ instructions is that he would meet them in Galilee: “[indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him](#)” (28:7), and “[But after I am raised up, I will go ahead of you to Galilee](#)” (26:32). Up this point no indication is given of where in Galilee the meeting was to take place. Matthew here simply says that it was on the mountain that Jesus had told the disciples where he would meet them.

In view of the generalized nature of the designation of “[a mountain](#),” the tendency is to speculate about the precise mountain. The sentimental, traditional choice is [Mt. Tabor](#) where the transfiguration most likely took place. But this is only speculation. For Matthew, the mountains are a place of revelation,

and encounter with the Heavenly Father. Thus, this final revelation to the disciples from Jesus appropriately takes place on a mountain. Not until moving to North Carolina in 1997 to live near the Blue Ridge mountains have I been able to appreciate the significant of this symbol in Matthew’s gospel.

Matthew designates the disciples by the number eleven, rather than the usual twelve. To be sure, this reflects the absence of Judas at this point from the group. The designation of the disciples as “eleven disciples” (οἱ ἑνδεκά μαθηταὶ) is found [only six times](#) in the New Testament: 1x Matthew; 1x Mark; 2x Luke; 2x Acts. The designation “twelve disciples” shows up [five times](#), and “twelve apostles” [four times](#). “Disciple” (μαθητής; *mathetes*) means learner or student, and is an important concept in Matthew’s gospel with 72 uses of the 261 total in the entire New Testament. This stands in contrast to the single use of “apostle” (ἀπόστολος; *apostolos*) in Matthew’s gospel in 10:2,

where the twelve are designated as apostles. Thus Matthew stresses in this text that the students are given an assignment, rather than apostles. This stresses active involvement in the task, rather than a supervisory role.

The play on words in our text is that “disciples” (μαθηταὶ) are to “make disciples”

(μαθητεύσατε). Thus stu-

dents are to turn everyone else into students. The teacher is Jesus himself.

The reaction of the disciples to Jesus is described in verse seventeen. They saw, they worshiped, they doubted.

They saw him (ιδόντες αὐτὸν). This is presented as secondary to the next two responses. In this scene, no mention is made of Jesus having appeared before them. In Luke’s narratives, Jesus “[drew near and went with them](#)” (Ἰησοῦς ἐγγίσας συνεπορεύετο αὐτοῖς; Lk. 24:15); and he “[stood in their midst](#)” (ἔστη



ἐν μέσῳ αὐτῶν; 24:36). John highlights the appearing of Jesus as he “came and stood among them” (ἦλθεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς καὶ ἔστη εἰς τὸ μέσον; 20:19); “the doors being shut Jesus came and stood in their midst” (ἔρχεται ὁ Ἰησοῦς τῶν θυρῶν κεκλεισμένων καὶ ἔστη εἰς τὸ μέσον; 20:26); “Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples” (ἐφάνερώσεν ἑαυτὸν πάλιν ὁ Ἰησοῦς τοῖς μαθηταῖς; 21:1). Evidently for Matthew the fact that Jesus made his presence visible is assumed by stressing not Jesus’ action but by the disciples being able to see him. The manner of Jesus’ appearing is secondary to the disciples’ seeing him in a way that triggered reaction. Dale Allison (ICC) has some helpful insight here:

The form and nature of Jesus’ resurrection body are in any event not described at all, nor do we learn whether the appearance was from heaven (cf. Acts 9:3–5) or on earth (as in 28:9–11; Luke 24; John 20–1). The omissions are not so surprising given the nearly exclusive emphasis upon Jesus’ words.

They worshiped (προσεκύνησαν). This action and the following one are presented by Matthew as the primary reactions, while the first one, “seeing,” is understood as a secondary response. Although the first, it merely laid the foundation for these two subsequent responses, one positive, the other negative.

Their reaction of worship is the same as the women at the empty tomb (28:9) προσεκύνησαν (*prosekunesan*). This is an important concept with some thirteen uses of the verb in Matthew’s gospel. People worshiped Jesus, beginning with the Wise Men (2:2) and concluding with the disciples on the Galilean mountain (28:17). Here the disciples not only recognized Jesus but realized his divinity just as did the women earlier. The central concept of the Greek verb is to bend the knee in homage and reverence to someone. At the heart then of worship is submission of oneself to the authority and deity of Christ.

They doubted (οἱ δὲ ἐδίστασαν). This statement is puzzling in light of the preceding one. Many translators struggle with the Greek text here as is illustrated in the comments in the *Translator’s Handbook* by B.M Newman and P.C. Stine:

But some doubted (so also NIV, Lu) appears in TEV as “even though some ... doubted.” NAB renders as though their doubt was something that took place prior to the resurrection appearance (“those who had entertained doubts”), although it follows with a footnote (“literally, ‘some doubted’”). NJB offers the time perspective of NAB as a possibility in its alternative reading (“though some had hesitated”), but the translators confess that this has less grammatical support



than the reading which they place in the text (“though some hesitated”). As a matter of fact, it is difficult to find any grammatical support for the interpretation of NAB; it appears rather to be an attempt to force a theological judgment on the text.

What is clear from the Greek text is that both actions of worshiping and doubting were simultaneous occurrences. But were the subjects of the two verbs the same? The frequent understanding is that they weren’t. The worshippers included all eleven, but the doubters were a small number within the eleven. This assumes -- on very uncertain grounds -- that the plural article, οἱ, here used to shift the subject to someone besides the already designated subject in verb 16, οἱ ἑνδεκα μαθηταί. The most natural understanding, however, is that the second abbreviated use of the substantival article in verse 17 merely refers back to the fuller subject reference in verse 16. The eleven disciples “doubted.” This is the dominant meaning of this construction (οἱ δὲ) elsewhere in Matthew: 2:5; 4:20, 22; 14:17, 33; 15:34; 16:7, 14; 20:5, 31; 21:25; 22:19; 26:15; 26:67; 27:4, 21, 23; 28:15.

What cannot be legitimately maintained is to connect up 28:16–20 to the 1 Cor. 15:6 reference to 500 present at an appearance in Galilee, and then assume that the doubters were in that group, rather than the eleven.

Before conclusions are drawn, an exploration of the Greek verb ἐδίστασαν must be made. Only found twice in the entire NT, and both in Matthew ([14:31](#) & [28:17](#)), the verb διστάζω (*distadzo*) first refers to Peter's hesitancy to trust himself and Jesus as he attempted to walk on the water out to Jesus. One should remember that in the Greek NT other words can be translated as doubt, among them are διακρίνομαι and διαλογισμός. These two move the idea of doubt to disbelief with a more emphatic sense of doubt, while διστάζω moves more toward hesitancy with a milder sense of doubt.

Thus, the most natural understanding of these two verbs in verse seventeen is that the eleven worshiped the risen Lord, but that they were somewhat hesitant. Very likely Matthew portrays them in the same role as that of the women at the empty tomb. There was this overwhelming sense of reverence because of being in the presence of the divine. Yet, there was hesitancy as well, which came naturally from also facing the unknown and the awesome power of God himself. For certain, this διστάζειν by the eleven found some basis in the subsequent words of Jesus that mandated the disciples to convert the entire world to discipleship commitment to Jesus.

The connection of verses 16-17 to us today? Numerous connections come to mind. First, the disciples were concerned enough to travel a great distance and with considerable effort to meet Jesus as He had asked them to do. Certainly, the Lord desires to meet with us today, his twenty-first century disciples. He has jobs for us to do; he wants to empower us for those tasks. But we must first meet with him. Are we willing to do that? On any given Sunday morning only a small portion of those claiming to be Christians will put forth the effort to study the Bible with fellow believers in a sincere effort to encounter the risen Christ through the pages of sacred scripture. Just as the mountain signified divine revelation to the disciples in Matthew's gospel, the Bible is for us that place of revelation and comprehension of God's will where we meet our Lord.

Second, do we yearn to "see" Christ? The disciples encountered the risen Christ with their physical eyes on that mountain. We encounter the same risen Christ with the spiritual eyes of our heart. The divine presence is the same; the channel to it is different. How much do we really desire to see our Lord like this? Serious encounter is risky. The blazing light

of his purity exposes our sin. The overwhelming power of the divine uncovers our weakness. His unquestioned authority unmasks our stubbornness to surrender self. When biblical characters stood in God's presence, the so-called [theophanies](#) in the Bible, the extreme distance between God and man always comes to center stage in the narrative. That is uncomfortable for us humans who tend to pride ourselves on our assumed strength.

Third, how well do we worship? In our worship do we sincerely "bend the knee" (προσκυνέω) in reverence and submission to our Lord? Somehow

kneeling is a missing element in most Baptist worship patterns today. To be sure, many health issues prevent this from being done easily. Yet, I wonder whether the

absence of kneeling suggests something beyond accommodating elderly and physically limited worshippers. Of course, one can physically kneel in a service without it reflecting reverence and submission of life to God. And the reverse is also true. But, the physical symbol is important, and is a visual reminder of what should be taking place inwardly as we worship.

Fourth, some doubted. This is most likely the easiest link in these two verses. Yet, what is our "doubting"? For the disciple Thomas earlier ([20:25](#)), his being absent from Jesus' appearance on that Sunday evening of Resurrection Day led to his declaration, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." We often call him "doubting Thomas." How does his "doubt" compare to 28:17? And to the common meaning of the English word "doubt"? A lot of commonality between John 20:25 and Matthew 28:17 is present, in my opinion. But not as much with the usual meaning of the English word "doubt." Both the disciples and Thomas were hesitant, but were moving toward certainty. Yet, differences are present. Thomas wanted to see the risen Christ in order to believe -- something he did some eight days later when Jesus appeared to the disciples with Thomas present ([Jhn. 20:26-29](#)). The disciples on the mountain expressed some hesitancy to completely surrender themselves largely because of the unknown factor always present in a theophany. In both instances, they were moving toward entrustment of themselves to God. Often with doubt in the modern use of the English term, the reverse direction is present. Doubt is a move toward disbelief and rejection. For example, when some-

Doubt can be either healthy or disastrous. It all depends on what kind of doubt it is.

one makes a claim about something, and we response with “I doubt that,” we are fast moving toward rejection. Doubt that is hesitancy can be healthy as it was for Thomas. Doubt as expressed by the Pharisees of Jesus day was spiritually disastrous,

because it signaled rejection of the claims of Jesus.

So the question comes: What kind of doubt is present in you? Is it moving toward faith, or toward rejection of Christ?

b. Jesus' commission, vv. 18-20

Greek NT

⟨28:18⟩ καὶ προσελθὼν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐλάλησεν αὐτοῖς λέγων, Ἐδόθη μοι πᾶσα ἐξουσία ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ [τῆς] γῆς. ⟨28:19⟩ πορευθέντες οὖν μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, βαπτίζοντες αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος, ⟨28:20⟩ διδάσκοντες αὐτοὺς τηρεῖν πάντα ὅσα ἐνετειλάμην ὑμῖν· καὶ ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ μεθ' ὑμῶν εἰμι πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος.

NASB

18 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

NRSV

18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

NLT

18 Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given complete authority in heaven and on earth. 19 Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. 20 Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Notes:

The first two verses, vv. 16-17, largely serve to set up the words of Jesus, found in the last three verses. The commissioning nature of these words is important to note, as we have discussed previously under [literary genre](#).

The introduction of these words, “Jesus came and said to them...,” (προσελθὼν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐλάλησεν αὐτοῖς λέγων...) suggests that Jesus in his initial appearance was at some distance from them. In order to speak to them, he had to move closer to where they were. These words describing Jesus’ action come immediately the expression of hesitancy at the end of verse seventeen. Thus, Jesus’ action becomes reassuring and helps the disciples overcome their uncertainty.

The words of Jesus contain three core expressions, each with expansion elements. See the [Block Diagram](#) for details. (1) Jesus was given complete authority; (2) the disciples were commissioned to disciple the nations; (3) Jesus promised his continuous presence with them.

(1) Complete authority: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Ἐδόθη μοι πᾶσα ἐξουσία ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ [τῆς] γῆς). Donald Hagner (*Word Biblical Commentary*) provides a helpful sum-

mation:

He begins with a vitally important prelude to the formal commissioning of the disciples, namely, the assertion of his authority: Ἐδόθη μοι πᾶσα ἐξουσία ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ [τῆς] γῆς, “all authority has been given to me in heaven and upon [the] earth.” The passive verb assumes God as the acting subject: God has given Jesus this comprehensive sovereignty over the whole of the created order. Already during his ministry he had made statements about his authority. In 9:6 (cf. 9:8) he referred to the ἐξουσίαν, “authority,” given to the Son of Man ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, “upon the earth,” in this case to forgive sins (cf. Dan 7:14 with respect to the Son of Man). In 11:27 he made the astonishing claim that Πάντα μοι παρεδόθη ὑπὸ τοῦ πατρός μου, “all things have been given to me by my Father” (see *Comment* on this verse and Lange’s discussion, 25–96; cf. John 3:35). From the risen Jesus, however, such a claim has all the more convincing power (cf. the exalted passage concerning the authority specifically of the risen Jesus in Eph 1:20–23). The resurrection serves as a vindication of the words and deeds of Jesus during his ministry. Now the resurrected (not resuscitated!) Jesus who appears before the disciples is one who partakes of a new order of existence and who here anticipates his glorious exaltation (enthronement; cf. 2 Sam 7:13) at God’s right hand (cf. Luke 24:51; Acts

1:9; Phil 2:9–11) and indeed the parousia itself. As on the mount of the transfiguration (17:1–8), the veil is taken away—but now permanently—so that the glorious identity of Jesus becomes plain (cf. 26:64). It is accordingly the one who has “all authority in heaven and on earth,” i.e., the sovereign authority of God, who now sends out his disciples on the mission to evangelize the world. This is to provide them in turn with authority and supply them with confidence as they go. The authority of the risen one is not categorically new but now depends upon a new basis—the arrival at a new stage of salvation history. Dan 7:13–14 provides important background material to vv 18–20, referring to one like a Son of Man who receives “dominion and glory and kingship,” an everlasting dominion, “that all peoples, nations and languages should serve him” (for the Dan 7 background to this pericope, see Schaberg’s discussion, 111–221).

The role of [Daniel 7:13-14](#) in the background of this cannot be over emphasized: “13 As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. 14 To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.” Jesus stands as the fulfillment of this vision and now claims this universal authority before his disciples. This then stands as the basis for his command to the disciples to make disciples of all nations, as the inferential conjunction “then” (οὖν) makes clear in verse 19.

(2) Make disciples: “Go therefore and *make disciples of all nations*, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you” (πορευθέντες οὖν *μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη*, βαπτίζοντες αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος, διδάσκοντες αὐτοὺς τηρεῖν πάντα ὅσα ἐνετειλάμην ὑμῖν). Although the English translation washes out the sentence structure of the Greek text, one command is present and is foundational to the three expansion elements: “*make disciples of all nations*.” Any perceived imperative force understood in the expansion elements (“having gone;” “baptizing;” “teaching”) is indirectly derived

from this central admonition.

Making disciples is very Matthean as Hagner (WBC) observes:

The verb *μαθητεύσατε*, “make disciples,” is characteristically Matthean (cf. 13:52; 27:57; the only other NT occurrence is in Acts 14:21 where it is linked with *εὐαγγελισάμενοι*, “having evangelized”). The word “disciple” means above all “learner” or “pupil.” The emphasis in the commission thus falls not on the initial proclamation of the gospel but more on the arduous task of nurturing into the experience of discipleship, an emphasis that is strengthened and explained by the instruction “teaching them to keep all that I have commanded” in v. 20a. To be made a disciple in Matthew means above all to follow after righteousness as articulated in the teaching of Jesus (see Kvalbein, *Themelios* 13 [1988] 48–53).



Also important is the targeted group, “all nations” (πάντα τὰ ἔθνη). As Dale Allison notes (*ICC*): “The prophecy that in Abraham all the families of the earth will be blessed (Gen 12:3 comes to fulfillment in the mission of the church.³⁶) For Matthew’s Jewish Christian initial audience, this was very significant.

The three expansion elements extend this core idea in two directions: a) preceding action (πορευθέντες); and b) accompanying actions (βαπτίζοντες αὐτοὺς; διδάσκοντες αὐτοὺς).

a) Preceding action: “*having gone*.” Before the nations can be discipled, students of Jesus must go to where the people are. Discipling can’t be done long distance. The astonishing aspect of this instruction to the Eleven is the command to move out of their Jewish comfort zone and uproot themselves into Gentile territory in order to make disciples. As the book of Acts demonstrates, this was not going to be easy. In fact, making disciples of Gentiles became the first major controversy of early Christianity (cf. Acts 15; Gal. 2-4). Ultimately, not any of these eleven would be central to extending the gospel to the non-Jewish world. Rather, God would use a converted Jewish Pharisee as the pioneering instrument. Yet, these eleven -- each in their own way -- would contribute to this universal mission of Christianity.

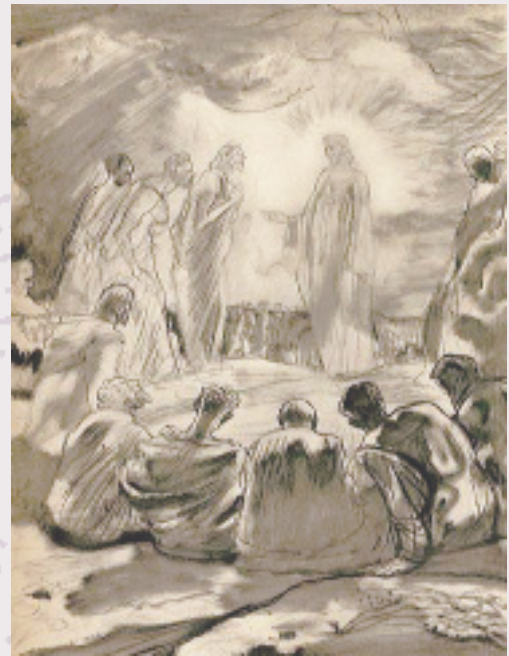
b) Accompanying actions: “*baptizing*” and “*teach-*

ing.” Early Christian [baptism](#) evolved from the baptizing actions of John (cf. [Mt. 3:6-12](#) with //s). Central to his practice was that baptism was an open expression of repentance from sinful conduct. The purifying significance of water in Jewish ritual tradition stood in the background. [Jesus’ baptism](#) represents a deviation from this orientation. But early Christian practice will focus on baptism as an expression of repentance. After the resurrection of Jesus, it took on the added meaning of identifying with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus as the foundation for that forgiveness of sin.

Here for the first time we note a trinitarian thrust to the act of baptizing; it is to be done in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This phrase has occasioned considerable discussion over the years of interpretative history, as L. Morris (*Pillar NT Commentary*) notes:

The words referring to the Trinity are another matter, but we must bear in mind that the faith mentioned in verse 18 “naturally issues in the concept of the Trinity” (Johnson).³⁶ We must bear in mind as well that in the early church there are references to baptizing in the name of Jesus (e.g., Acts 8:16; 19:5). Bonnard notices this difficulty, but immediately adds, “one cannot doubt that the Trinitarian formula was already there in germ in Paul” (p. 416; similarly Allen remarks, “the conception Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is clearly as ancient as the Christian Society itself”). Such passages, however, may not give the formula used in baptizing, but be a short way of differentiating Christian baptism from the other baptisms in the ancient world. For that matter the words about the Trinity are not necessarily meant to be used as a formula,³⁷ though in the history of the church they have often been so used and they form a fitting part of baptismal services.³⁸ That the early followers of Jesus thought of God as triune seems clear from the passages that speak of the three together (e.g., Rom. 8:11; 1 Cor. 12:4–6; 2 Cor. 13:14; Gal. 4:6; Eph. 4:4–6; 2 Thess. 2:13, etc.). That God is a Trinity is a scriptural idea.³⁹ Jesus spoke a good deal about the Father, but not so much about the Holy Spirit, and he did not link himself with the two in a way comparable to the formula we have here. This being so, it is perhaps not surprising that many modern scholars assert that Matthew is here reading the custom of his church back onto the lips of Jesus. But there is no objective criterion to decide the point. If we hold that Matthew gives a reliable picture of the life and teaching of Jesus, we will say that the formula that has come to mean so much to the Christian church goes back to Jesus himself and to those days when he had risen from the dead and was giving direction to his followers for the times ahead when they would have to manage the affairs of the church without his visible

presence. If we think that Matthew is reflecting the life of the later church in which he lived, then here as elsewhere we will think that he has made use of ecclesiastical formularies.⁴⁰ We



should notice that the word *name* is singular; Jesus does not say that his followers should baptize in the “names” of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but in the “name” of these three. It points to the fact that they are in some sense one.

Some of this modern difficulty stems from seeing v. 19 as framing a ritual formula for verbal expression in the act of baptism. This is not the way the text is set up, although it was subsequently used in this way. Keeping this distinction clearly in mind eliminates most of the modern objections.

In the ancient world, the Romans tended not to pay much attention to devotees to a new religious cult until they underwent some kind of initiation ritual that formally identified them with that religious group. If the religious group was deemed a *religio illisita* -- illegal religion -- then the individual stood guilty of treason against Rome and was subject to execution. For Christians, baptism became that formal, public identification with the Christian movement. After Christianity distanced itself from Judaism, which had legal status, it then moved into the domain of illegal religion and became vulnerable to governmental persecution. This continued until the fourth century when Christianity became the official religion of the Roman empire.

By then the concept of baptism had significantly changed from the NT perspective of an outward expression of repentance seeking forgiveness of sin in identifying with Christ’s death and resurrection. It had served to symbolize what was supposed to have taken place inwardly in a change of heart and commitment with faith in Christ. By the fourth century

baptism had become the instrument of removal of original sin, and identification with the Church as the means of God's redemption in the world. Christ was still in the picture, but only as one of several players. In the Protestant Reformation, and especially in the Radical Reformation of our Anabaptist forbearers, the NT understanding reemerged, although with varying degrees of success.

In this commissioning declaration of Jesus, Christian baptism is intended to function as a beginning step in becoming a disciple of Jesus. That formal, public identification with Christ as the foundation of our cleansing from sin is essential to authentic discipleship. Without it, any so-called profession of faith is suspect. Anyone unwilling to take this step of public confession through baptism doesn't stand on NT grounds for claiming to be a Christian.

Teaching obedience to Christ's words is the second accompanying action. The student motif in μαθητεύσατε is reinforced by this modal participle in Greek, διδάσκοντες αὐτοὺς τηρεῖν πάντα ὅσα ἐνετειλάμην ὑμῖν. A significant part of making disciples is teaching the students to do what the Teacher has said to do. In the context of Matthew's gospel, this meant the content of Jesus' teaching in Matthew's account of Jesus' teachings. Foundational to this would be the Sermon on the Mount, which stands in the first gospel as the initial summation of the very heart of what Jesus taught during his earthly ministry. The larger implication of these words is the revelatory witness to Jesus contained in the entire New Testament as the inspired apostolic testimony to Christ.

Note the objective of the ongoing teaching: "to observe everything that I have commanded you" (τηρεῖν πάντα ὅσα ἐνετειλάμην ὑμῖν). Instruction is not mere providing of information. Rather, it is targeted instruction. Its objective is to produce obedience to Jesus' teaching. That is, the obedient student is to produce other obedient students to the Teacher's instruction. Learning about Jesus is not enough. We are to learn to obey Jesus. The implications of this are enormous. The believing community is to be a school where Jesus' words are taught continuously. Everyone is expected to make good grades, and these are achieved through putting into practice what has been learned on a daily basis.

(3) His promised presence: "And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (καὶ ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ μεθ' ὑμῶν εἰμι πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος). Matthew's gospel ends with Jesus

promising a continual presence with his disciples. Note Lester Morris' comments (*Pillar NT*):

The Gospel ends with Jesus' breathtaking promise that he is with his followers *all the days*⁴³ *to the end of the age*.⁴⁴ He does not say "I will be with you," but "*I am with you*," and his ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ is emphatic, "no less than I." Bruce sees this expression as "conveying the feeling of certainty, but also spoken from the eternal point of view, *sub specie aeternitatis*, for which distinctions of here and there, now and then, do not exist." In other words, the disciple is not going to be left to serve God as well as he can in the light of what he has learned from the things Jesus has commanded. The disciple will find that he has a great companion as he goes on his way through life. This tells us something about Jesus. The Jesus of whom Matthew writes is no small Palestinian figure, but a mighty Person who is with his followers wherever they may be. And this, he says, will last through time. He is not speaking of a temporary residence with first-century disciples, but of a presence among his followers to the very end of time. This Gospel opened with the assurance that in the coming of Jesus God was with his people (1:23), and it closes with the promise that the very presence of Jesus Christ will never be lacking to his faithful follower. This does not, of course, mean that Jesus has not been with his people hitherto; he has made it clear that where two or three are met in his name he is there, right in the middle of them (18:20). But when Matthew draws his Gospel to its close, he has nothing in the way of an ascension account. He emphasizes the importance of his continuing presence and concludes his Gospel with the magnificent assurance to the followers of Jesus that that presence will never be withdrawn; he will be with them always, to the end of the world and to the end of time.

The connection of these words of Jesus to us? Enormous! They challenge us to bring the entire world to the feet of our Lord to become his followers. We are provided with both the authorization and the spiritual help necessary to achieve this goal. These words, however, place a huge responsibility on us. We cannot achieve this command by mere preaching of the gospel here and then move on to the next spot. No! We are making disciples, not just sharing a message. This requires developing relationships, spending time to nurture and helping develop spiritual maturity. We must teach, not just baptize. Thus, we must ourselves be passionate students of Jesus who both in his words and actions shows us how to get the job done.

Greek NT

〈28:16〉 Οἱ δὲ ἑνδεκα μαθηταὶ ἐπορεύθησαν εἰς τὴν Γαλιλαίαν εἰς τὸ ὄρος οὗ ἐτάξατο αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς, 〈28:17〉 καὶ ἰδόντες αὐτὸν προσεκύνησαν, οἱ δὲ ἐδίστασαν. 〈28:18〉 καὶ προσελθὼν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐλάλησεν αὐτοῖς λέγων, Ἐδόθη μοι πᾶσα ἐξουσία ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ [τῆς] γῆς. 〈28:19〉 πορευθέντες οὖν μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, βαπτίζοντες αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος, 〈28:20〉 διδάσκοντες αὐτοὺς τηρεῖν πάντα ὅσα ἐνετειλάμην ὑμῖν· καὶ ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ μεθ' ὑμῶν εἰμι πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος.

NASB

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

NRSV

16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. 18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

NLT

16 Then the eleven disciples left for Galilee, going to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped him – but some of them still doubted! 18 Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given complete authority in heaven and on earth. 19 Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. 20 Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Greek NT Diagrammed

- 28:16 δὲ
1 **Οἱ ἑνδεκα μαθηταὶ ἐπορεύθησαν**
εἰς τὴν Γαλιλαίαν
εἰς τὸ ὄρος
οὗ ἐτάξατο αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς,
- 28:17 καὶ
2 **ιδόντες αὐτὸν**
προσεκύνησαν,
3 **δὲ**
οἱ ἐδίστασαν.
- 28:18 καὶ
4 **προσελθὼν**
ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐλάλησεν αὐτοῖς
λέγων,
α **Ἐδόθη μοι πᾶσα ἐξουσία**
ἐν οὐρανῷ
καὶ
ἐπὶ [τῆς] γῆς.
- 28:19 οὖν
β **πορευθέντες**
μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη,
βαπτίζοντες αὐτοὺς
εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς
καὶ
τοῦ υἱοῦ
καὶ
τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος,
28:20 διδάσκοντες αὐτοὺς
τηρεῖν πάντα
ὅσα ἐνετειλάμην ὑμῖν.
καὶ
γ **ιδού**
ἐγὼ μεθ' ὑμῶν εἰμι
πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας
ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος.

Semantic Diagram

I--	A	1	δε	1 Aor	Dep	Ind	3	P	Οἱ ἑνδεκα μαθηταὶ
			καὶ						
	B	1	δε	1 Aor	Act	Ind	3	P	(αὐτοὶ)
		2	καὶ	1 Aor	Act	Ind	3	P	(αὐτοὶ)
II-	A	4	καὶ	1 Aor	Act	Ind	3	S	ὁ Ἰησοῦς
	B	1	α	1 Aor	Pass	Ind	3	S	πᾶσα ἐξουσία
			οὖν						
		2	β	1 Aor	Act	Imp	2	P	(ὁμοῖς)
			καὶ ἰδοὺ						
		3	γ	Pres	---	Ind	1	S	ἐγὼ

Exegetical Outline

- I. (1-3) The “twelve” disciples met Jesus on the Galilean mountain in reverence.
 - A. (1) The twelve went to the mountain in Galilee where Jesus had told them.
 - B. (2-3) Reverence and doubt were mingled together at the sight of Jesus
 1. (2) They worshiped him once they saw him.
 2. (3) Some of them doubted what they saw.
- ii. (4-γ) Jesus spoke to the Twelve with instructions to make everyone a disciple.
 - A. (4) Jesus spoke to them as he came near.
 - B. (α-γ) Jesus’ instructions focused on discipling all nations through his power.
 1. (α) He claimed complete authority.
 2. (β) In light of this he told them to make disciples of all nations.
 3. (γ) He promised his continual presence.