

# Going out the way we came in—Matthew 28:16-20

**Theme:** Having become learners of his revolution, Jesus sends us into the world to be its messengers, buoyed up by his presence wherever we go

Discipleship is about living as well as learning. Having begun to grasp what Jesus' revolution is all about, we're called to pass it on to everyone around us. It's intended not only to change our lives and weave us into communities of disciples, but also to change the world of which Jesus is already Lord: as we seek to make disciples of everyone we meet everywhere we go, so Jesus' lordship is seen and acknowledged in more places and his revolution spreads.

## Questions:

1. Having read the five discourses, how would we summarise the message of Jesus? [Try to use the language that Matthew does rather than Paul's!]
2. Do we feel we know enough to tell others the good news about Jesus revolution?
3. What do we think we need to know to be a disciple-maker? Do we know it?
4. Is the command to 'go' for all Christians or just for those we call 'missionaries'? [you may like to consult study 1 for help here]
5. In what ways do we know that Jesus is with us when we go into the world? Do we feel his presence more when we're with other Christians? If so, how?
6. Do we think every disciple is a believer with L-plates? If so, how do we ensure we go on learning throughout our lives? Where do we get the confidence to share what we know?
7. How much of our faith do we pass on by how we live?
8. What do we think is the best way of teaching people all Jesus has commanded? When should we be doing it?
9. How can we help one another to live consistent lives when we're on our own at work or home?
10. Do we think making disciples is a political activity as well as a personal one? If so, how? If not, why not?
11. What does it mean when we say that Jesus has all authority?
12. How can we help one another to be better disciple-makers?

## Your stories:

## Potted summary

Having learned the content of the revolution Jesus came to start, we are now called to live it and pass it on to others. We go into a sometimes hostile world, knowing that Jesus is with us and that we have all we need to live and spread the revolution around. More than that, we know that Jesus is Lord of all, that history finds its meaning and goal in him, that his Kingdom will come to earth—and we are its advance guard.

More over the page....

# What the passage is about....

So, we've arrived back at the exit, the door through which we came into the gospel to explore what discipleship is all about. Now we go out into the world through that same door, armed with all that Matthew has told us of Jesus' way of life as our map and manual.

Because when we entered by this story, we read the text forward, as we exit we'll read it backwards, starting at v20 and ending with our response in v16.

Matthew has told us the story of Jesus in such a way that we learn two crucial lessons:

Firstly, we learn who he is. The gospel tells us clearly that Jesus is God's Son come to rescue his people from their sins (1:21). More than that, he is the presence of God permanently with his people (1:23). In his conclusion we read of the one who has all authority and who is with us always. It's worth also noting in passing that the baptismal formula contained in these verses is proof that the New Testament had the beginnings of a Trinitarian understanding of God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit (v19).

Secondly, we learn how to be a disciple of Jesus. Matthew has created his account to provide us with all the material we need to learn and live the message that Jesus both told and embodied. The five discourses we have studied—5:1-7:27; 9:35-10:42; 13:1-52; 18:1-35 and 24:1-25:46—are Matthew's discipleship manual, a primer on Christian living that we not only need to learn and live but also be prepared to pass on to others to encourage them to join the revolution.

Here in these marvellously composed verses, Matthew uses the word 'all' four times (as we saw in study 1). The phrases containing the word wrap up Jesus' call to faithful living in a promise to be with us and a pronouncement of authority that should give us confidence to live for him whatever our circumstances.

## 1) All the days (20)

Jesus' promise reminds of two places earlier in the gospel, where a similar promise is made to us as individuals and a church:

**i) Emmanuel** (1:23): the fulfilment of Isaiah 7:14 and 8:8,10, but more importantly the beginning of the unveiling of a picture of a wonder child, born to the House of David who would usher in the Kingdom of justice and joy that Israel's kings had so obviously failed to do, that climaxes in 9:6-7 and 11:1-5. Jesus is that child, a king and liberator who will be with his people forever

**ii) everywhere & time:** in particular

this phrase picks up Jesus' promise to his followers in 18:20 that wherever and whenever a small number are gathered, he's there in the midst. It's a reminder as he sends them to the ends of the earth that because he's there with them, they'll be able to face whatever comes their way, secure in the knowledge that he'll guide them to do the right thing (see the notes on 18:18-20)

For disciples travelling in an uncertain world, not sure of the reception their way of life and message will receive, it is a huge comfort to know their Lord travels with them (Acts 16:7; Philippians 1:14, 19; 2 Timothy 4:17; 1 Peter 4:14). It's also a reminder of the need to be in fellowship with one another (notice how Paul always travelled with a team and sought fellowship on his journeys: Acts 21:1-16). For while we can and do encounter Christ's presence when we're alone, Matthew stresses that we often experience that presence in special and wonderful ways when we're with others (10:40; 18:5, 20; 25:40; 26:26)

## 2) All that I've commanded (20)

Jesus sends us to make disciples. How? Through living and teaching all that he's taught us, namely the content of the five discourses and the stories with which they've come wrapped in this gospel.

Disciples are believers with L-plates. The word means learner and we go on learning throughout our Christian lives. But that doesn't mean we can't pass on what we're learning. We see this everywhere in the New Testament—here are two examples:

**i) Epaphras:** Colossians 1:7-8, 4:12-13: a businessman, follower of Jesus and maker of disciples. 1:10-14 spells out what we're all learning and passing on: a way of living that reflects the message (10), growing in what we know (10), getting stronger and better able to deal with what life throws at us (11) and giving thanks for all God's done for us in Christ (12-14)

**ii) Paul:** Philippians 3:4-21, especially 10-12: a life lived seeking an answer to the question he asked in Acts 9:5; a life spent travelling as a leather worker and disciple maker, teacher and church planter.

We too have to sort out how our work and social position enable us to live as and make disciples through our daily lives in world and church. We will usually only be a single link in the chain that leads someone to faith, but we need to grasp that we each have a key role in making Jesus' revolution visible where we live, work, play and worship.

## 3) All nations (19)

Jesus sends us everywhere. Nowhere is off-limits to the reach of his revolution; there is not a culture that doesn't need to be touched and transformed by this message, drawn into his Kingdom:

**i) personal:** he sends us to all people, starting with our neighbours and ending with people in distant lands. His is a message that says God's loves us all equally, sent his son to save us (something we can't do for ourselves), gives his Spirit to help us live the new life we've been given through his grace as we've believed. This is what the first teaching discourse is all about—we're poor, weak, hungry, hopeless and God gives us his Kingdom, his acceptance and forgiveness because he loves us. He wants us to pass that on.

**ii) political:** it's a revolution in how the world is organised. So the gospel has vital things to say about family life, work, the distribution of resources and how we are governed. There is no sacred/secular divide in the Christian faith.

The revolution is all-embracing and all-encompassing; it needs to be seen and heard everywhere by all people. How will that happen? We will take it there; others will join us, of course, but each and every Christian disciple is called to learn and live and pass the revolution on to others.

## 4) All authority (18)

Jesus is the fulfilment of Daniel 7:13-14; he is the one ascending to the throne room of the ancient of days who is given authority over everything forever. He is the one who says which way is up. His rule is the one that will outlast every human ruler and system of government. His Kingdom and way of exercising authority is the norm for this world and the next. It is because of this that we can pray with hope, confidence and expectation 'Your Kingdom come; your will be done on earth as it is in heaven' (6:9-13)

And what's our response to all this? Do we worship or hesitate (16—better than 'doubt')? Some of the eleven were hesitant: did they doubt it was Jesus; were they uncertain they should worship him, unsure they could carry on without him? Possibly a mixture of all those things. But these and others turned the world upside down (Acts 17:6)

We too have the same choice: do we hesitate—I didn't sign up for this; I'm not good enough to be involved in this?—or do we worship him the way Paul tells us to by offering our lives (Romans 12:1-2) and saying to him 'whatever you want me to do, I'll do it'? It's our choice