

April 28

Lesson 9 (NIV)

CALLED TO MAKE DISCIPLES

DEVOTIONAL READING: Colossians 3:12–

17

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Matthew

28:16–20; Acts 1:6–8

MATTHEW 28:16–20

¹⁶Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

ACTS 1:6–8

⁶Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to

Israel?”

⁷He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”



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KEY VERSES

“Go 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 I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”—**Matthew 28:19, 20**

DISCIPLESHIP AND MISSION

Unit 2: Call to Ministry

LESSONS 5–9

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Give the content of Jesus' commissions.
2. Describe challenges to keeping the Great Commission as the church's top priority.
3. Create a series of steps to improve his or her church's efforts at fulfilling the Great Commission.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. "This Changes Everything"
 - B. Lesson Context: Matthew
 - C. Lesson Context: Acts
- I. Commission in Matthew (MATTHEW 28:16–20)
 - A. Disciples Gather (vv. 16, 17)
 - B. Jesus Commands (vv. 18–20)
Figurative, Literal, Literalistic?
 - II. Commission in Acts (ACTS 1:6–8)
 - A. Flawed Question (v. 6)
 - B. First Priority (vv. 7, 8)
Secrets Best Kept That Way

Conclusion

- A. What Only the Church Can Do
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

HOW TO SAY IT

ascension uh-*sen*(t)-shun.

Corinthians	Ko-rin-thee-unz (<i>th</i> as in <i>thin</i>).
Cornelius	Cor- <i>neel</i> -yus.
Galatians	Guh- <i>lay</i> -shunz.
Galilee	Gal-uh-lee.
Gentile	Jen-tile.
Immanuel	Ih- <i>man</i> -you-el.
Judea	Joo- <i>dee</i> -uh.
Pentecost	Pent-ih-kost.
Philippians	Fih- <i>lip</i> -ee-unz.
Pilate	Pie-lut.
Samaria	Suh- <i>mare</i> -ee-uh.
synecdoche	suh- neck -duh- <i>kee</i> .

Introduction

A. "This Changes Everything"

The slogan "This changes everything" has been used at length in advertising. The claim has been attached to a flavoring for water, an allergy relief medication, a truck, and a brand of mayonnaise. Even a book bears that slogan as a title!

Obviously, the overuse of any slogan can rob it of its original appeal. But when we consider the impact of Jesus' resurrection, we can say beyond a shadow of a doubt that "this changes everything." Today's lesson tells us why.

B. Lesson Context: Matthew

Today's lesson text presents two

Today's lesson text presents two accounts of Jesus' giving his disciples instructions for continuing his ministry in his absence. The first, from [Matthew 28](#), comes immediately after the passage from last week's study. That passage recounted events surrounding the resurrection of Jesus and the resurrection itself.

All that took place in and near Jerusalem. A change in geographical context is introduced, however, by the transition noted in [Matthew 28:16](#), which opens today's lesson.

C. Lesson Context: Acts

The second account comes from the book of Acts. This book is Luke's record of the history of the first-century church. A vital part of what preceded the founding of the church ([Acts 2](#)) was a commission or charge given to the apostles before Jesus' ascension near Bethany ([Luke 24:50, 51](#)).

At first glance, the author Luke seems to record two locations for that event: Bethany, as above, and the Mount of Olives, per [Acts 1:12](#). But no contradiction exists when we realize that Bethany was so close to the Mount of Olives that the village is said to be "at" the mount ([Mark 11:1](#); [Luke 19:29](#)). This location was at least 60 miles south of Galilee, but less than two miles from Jerusalem. The tiny vil-

lage of Bethany is mentioned 11 times in the New Testament, all in the four Gospels. (Not counted is a different Bethany in [John 1:28](#).)

The geographical contexts of our two lesson-segments are different, but the time frame is the same. Both occur during the 40 days of [Acts 1:3](#). This period begins at Jesus resurrection and ends before Pentecost, when the church is established.

I. Commission in Matthew ([MATTHEW 28:16-20](#))

The location of our first lesson-segment is in accordance with the instructions from both the angel at the tomb and the resurrected Jesus himself ([Matthew 28:7, 10](#)).

A. Disciples Gather (vv. 16, 17)

16. Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go.

With Judas no longer among their number, *the eleven disciples* make the multi-day trip back to *Galilee*. The text does not tell us which specific *mountain* this is.

17a. When they saw him, they worshiped him;

Exactly how long after Jesus' resurrection this appearance takes place is also

not clear. The first-day appearances are recorded in [Matthew 28:9, 10](#); [Mark 16:9-14](#); [Luke 24:13-32](#); and [John 20:19-25](#). The next recorded appearance was “a week later” ([John 20:26-29](#)). Following that was an appearance to 7 of the 11 by the Sea of Galilee, or Tiberias ([John 21:1-23](#)). The appearance to over 500 believers recorded in [1 Corinthians 15:6](#) may occur between that of [John 21](#) and the one in the text before us—much uncertainty exists.

17b. but some doubted.

Despite the previous appearances of Jesus, doubts persist. It would seem by this point that the 11 disciples are fully convinced that Jesus has risen from the dead. Therefore the group gathered here in Galilee may include other followers of Jesus, some of whom have not yet seen him since his resurrection. One theory is that this occasion is also that of [1 Corinthians 15:6](#), just noted.

What Do You Think?

What’s the best way to react the next time doubts interfere with your worship? Why?

Digging Deeper

Which of the following passages helps you most in this regard: [Matthew 14:28-33](#); [21:21](#); [Mark 9:24](#); [John 20:24-29](#), [James 1:6-8](#); [Jude 20-25](#)? Why?

B. Jesus Commands (vv. 18-20)

18. Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Such a sweeping statement reflects Jesus’ conquest of death (compare [Revelation 1:18](#)). The word in the original language behind the translation *authority* is translated “power” in other contexts (examples: [John 19:10, 11](#)). We may think of power as the ability to do something, while authority is the right to do something. Thus the two ideas are closely related, and Jesus has both in an absolute sense. Indeed, the word *all* dominates this section of three verses. There is nothing partial or halfway about anything here!

This has been clearly implied on many occasions throughout his ministry. His teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, for example, overturned commonly held views with the declaration, “But I tell you ...” ([Matthew 5:22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44](#)). He had exercised power over disease, nature, and death. Now his own resurrection proves the claim beyond a shadow of a doubt. And what he claims is what he possessed in the beginning ([John 1:1-3](#)).

The fact that this authority *has been given* to Jesus implies that the heavenly Father, having sent the Son ([Galatians 4:4](#)), is the one who has given the Son all power and authority. What is implied

here is unmistakable in [Matthew 11:27](#); [John 3:35](#); [13:3](#); [17:2](#); [Ephesians 1:20–22](#); and [Philippians 2:9–11](#).

What Do You Think?

In what ways can and will your choices in the coming week show that Christ is the ultimate authority and power in your life?

Digging Deeper

How can you make those choice also speak against popular alternative “authorities”?

19a. “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations,

Jesus can do many things with the power and authority he has. He can take immediate vengeance on those who crucified him. He can destroy the Roman occupiers and restore Israel’s self-governing status. Jesus does indeed desire that *all nations* recognize and honor him. But the method here is not that of brute force. Instead, he desires it to happen by means of making *disciples* of those nations.

It is interesting to consider occasions during Jesus’ ministry when he told someone who had been blessed by a miracle not to tell anyone ([Matthew 8:3, 4](#); [9:29, 30](#); [12:15, 16](#); [17:9](#); etc.). The reason for this directive is seen in what happened when it was disobeyed: “Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed

outside in lonely places” ([Mark 1:45](#)).

Now, however, the time for silence is over! The good news about Jesus is to be made known to everyone everywhere. Jesus had focused his three-year ministry on Israel ([Matthew 10:5, 6](#); [15:21–24](#)). But he has also indicated that his kingdom will be inclusive of all peoples ([Matthew 8:11](#); [Luke 13:29](#)). This is nothing new, since Old Testament prophets predicted this ([Isaiah 42:6](#); [49:6](#); [Jeremiah 3:17](#); [Daniel 7:14](#); [Micah 4:2](#); etc.). This is how the promise to Abraham that “all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” will be fulfilled ([Genesis 12:3](#); compare [Galatians 3:8](#)).

What Do You Think?

What one thing extra can you do in the week ahead to help take the gospel to a nation other than your own?

Digging Deeper

What distractions might Satan offer to divert your attention from doing so?

19b. “baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

Making disciples is characterized, in part, by *baptizing* those being taught. The meaning and significance of baptism are addressed elsewhere ([Acts 2:38](#); [19:4, 5](#); [Romans 6:3, 4](#); [Galatians 3:27](#); [Colossians](#)

2:12; 1 Peter 3:21; etc.). The stress here is submission and allegiance to *the Father*, ... *the Son* and ... *the Holy Spirit*.

Obedience to this command is seen in Acts 8:36–38; 9:18; 16:33; 18:8; etc. But some students wonder why Peter will command baptism only “in the name of Jesus Christ” on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:38) and later (10:48). The fact that Peter does so indicates that he does not see a contradiction. It is clear from Jesus’ teaching that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are in complete unity with one another (John 16:12–15; compare 1 Peter 1:2). To baptize in the name of Jesus must include the other two.

FIGURATIVE, LITERAL, LITERALISTIC?

I’ve spent much of my life as a teacher in Christian colleges. During those decades, my students have included some who doubted their faith, others who were solid Christians, and yet others who were so “solid” that they could not be swayed from an overly rigid approach to biblical truth.

For example, one student in the latter category said she believed that everything in the Bible should be “interpreted literally.” In an attempt to help her see that figurative language such as hyperbole was in the Bible, I asked if she still had both eyes and both hands—in spite of what Jesus said in Matthew 5:29, 30.

She began to catch the idea, but still found it hard to give up her insistence on unbending literalism. Finally, she said, “OK, I literally believe some of the things in the Bible are figurative!” I suggested to her that what she was really trying to say was that she always approached the Bible seriously.

Some Christian fellowships struggle over the flexibility (or inflexibility) of Bible language. How can baptism administered “in Jesus’ name” be as valid as baptism done “in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit”? The answer may lie in the category of figurative language known as *synecdoche*. That is a figure of speech where mention of a part is intended to refer to the whole or vice versa.

A serious acceptance of biblical truth must not require us to exercise a “one size fits all” method of interpretation to every verse in the Bible. When Jesus says “I am the gate” in John 10:7, he is literally a gate in the sense of being a portal or barrier between two areas. He is not a gate in a literalistic sense of being made from wood and swinging on iron hinges!

—C. R. B.

20a. “and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”

Teaching does not end once someone becomes a disciple of Jesus. Discipleship is in truth a school of lifelong learning

from which one does not graduate while on this earth. Every follower of Jesus must continue to learn how to be Christ's person anew through the various stages of life—teenager, adult, spouse, parent, grandparent, widow(er), etc. Being a disciple of Jesus informs each transition, providing the disciple with additional opportunities to present the good news of Jesus to others.

2ob. “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Jesus concludes what we call the Great Commission with the assurance of his presence at all times. Matthew mentions toward the beginning of his Gospel how Jesus' birth fulfilled the prophecy of [Isaiah 7:14](#), that a virgin will give birth to a son who will be called Immanuel ([Matthew 1:22, 23](#)), meaning “God with us.” Now Matthew concludes his record with Jesus' assurance that he will be with his followers as they carry out the task he gives them.

II. Commission in Acts ([Acts 1:6–8](#))

In the first recorded words of Jesus in the book of Acts, he tells his apostles not to leave Jerusalem until the promised baptism of the Holy Spirit ([Acts 1:4, 5](#)). Our lesson picks up at this point. The 40-day period of [Acts 1:3](#) is coming to a close.

A. Flawed Question (v. 6)

6. Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”

The original text has a word meaning “therefore,” which is untranslated here. It connects the apostles' question with Jesus' teachings concerning “the kingdom of God” ([Acts 1:3](#)) and his promise that they will be “baptized with the Holy Spirit” ([1:5](#)). The very nature of the question reveals that the apostles just don't get it! Jesus has taught repeatedly, through both parable and direct teaching, that his kingdom is spiritual in nature. But these men are still thinking in terms of a political kingdom. They are anticipating a conqueror who will overthrow Roman rule. They are expecting that the “glory days” experienced under King David will be restored.

B. First Priority (vv. 7, 8)

7. He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.”

Jesus had previously warned his disciples not to let themselves be distracted by a fascination with setting dates for his return ([Matthew 24:36–44; 25:13](#)). Here the issue is the establishment of his kingdom, but the warning remains the same:

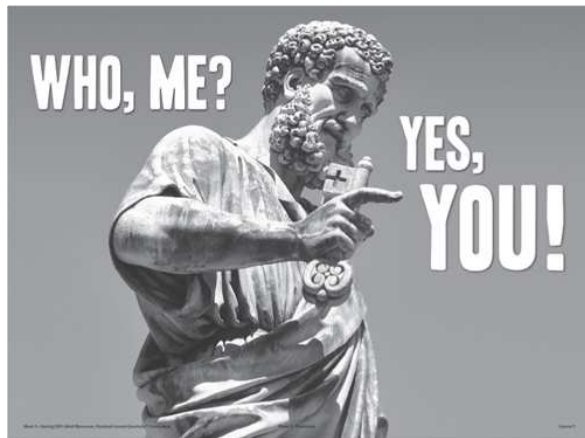
God is the ultimate timekeeper. Information such as this has been withheld from humanity.

What Do You Think?

What tactics might Satan use to get Christians distracted with end-times speculation?

Digging Deeper

Propose a defense to each tactic you imagine Satan might use.



Visual for Lesson 9. Have this visual clearly visible as you pose the discussion question associated with either [Matthew 28:19a](#) or [Acts 1:8b](#).

SECRETS BEST KEPT THAT WAY

“I’ll tell you a secret, but you have to promise you won’t tell anyone” is a guaranteed conversation starter. Who can resist the chance to learn a secret, especially if it’s really juicy? Perhaps you’ve heard about the person who said, “I never say anything about anybody unless it’s

good, and let me tell you, this is really good!”

Jesus’ parting words to his disciples included recognition of a secret: there are certain things regarding time lines that humans are not privileged (or burdened!) to know. That fact has troubled Christians ever since (compare [2 Thessalonians 2:1, 2](#)). It seems that many of the first-century Christians understood Jesus to be saying he would return within their lifetimes (compare [2 Peter 3:3, 4](#)). But when the last of the apostles had died, that perspective was proven false.

Even so, some modern Christians have asserted that Christ “returned” in a spiritual sense at the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Various movements have been founded on the premise that Christ’s return would be within the founders’ lifetimes. Yet the secret remains a secret.

When the disciples asked Jesus to reveal the full secret, he told them, in effect, not to bother themselves with this issue. Instead, they were to focus on the task ahead and the supernatural help he was sending (see the next verse). Task or speculation—which do we focus on?

—C. R. B.

8a. “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you;

Jesus has a far more significant work for his followers to engage in than date-

fixation. Their priority must be to *receive power* of the *Holy Spirit* (which happens on the Day of Pentecost; [Acts 2](#)). Thus Jesus makes sure that the distraction question of verse 6 hasn't caused them to miss his statement of verse 5.

8b. “and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Many students of the Bible have noted that this sequence of places provides an outline of the gospel's progress as recorded by Luke in the book of Acts. The gospel is first preached by Peter in *Jerusalem* on the Day of Pentecost. The impact of that message is immediate as 3,000 are led to become followers of Jesus ([Acts 2:41](#)).

Later the movement expands into *Judea* (the region in which Jerusalem is located) and *Samaria*. This is spurred by the persecution initiated by Saul, which forces the believers out of Jerusalem ([Acts 8:1](#)).

Taking the message *to the ends of the earth* begins with the conversion of Cornelius and his household (the first Gentile converts). It is furthered by the missionary journeys of Paul. On one such journey, he too will speak of the futility of being concerned with “times and dates” ([1 Thessalonians 5:1](#)).

At the conclusion of Acts, Paul is in Rome—a location which at that time

represents “the ends of the earth.” It marked a goal that Paul had been keenly intent on reaching ([Acts 19:21](#); [23:11](#)). The gospel was already there before Paul came. Of course, Paul was always thinking of new frontiers, such as Spain ([Romans 15:23, 24](#)) to which the gospel might be taken (compare [2 Corinthians 10:15, 16](#)).

While the commissions of Jesus in Matthew and Acts differ in certain details, they have one crucial item in common: Jesus wants his followers to take his message of salvation to the entire world. That is to be the top priority for the apostles as the Day of Pentecost approaches. It must still be the church's top priority today.

Jesus' commission here is immediately followed by his ascension into Heaven. Luke records this both in his Gospel ([Luke 24:51](#)) and in the first chapter of Acts.

What Do You Think?

What practical steps can and will you take in the week ahead to become a more effective witness for the Lord?

Digging Deeper

In what ways can nonbiblical resources help you in this, if at all? Why?

Conclusion

A. What Only the Church Can Do

Dr. Joe Ellis was a highly respected and innovative authority on church growth. His books include *The Church on Purpose* and *The Church on Target*, both of which are intended to provide encouragement and practical guidelines for growth to congregations and their leadership.

One of Dr. Ellis's most insightful statements comes from another book he wrote entitled *The Personal Evangelist*. It is this: "The most important tasks the church can do are those that only the church can do."

What is it that the church, and only the church, can do? What makes the church unique?

The answer is that the church alone possesses and can pass along the message of salvation from sin. This message is founded on the facts of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That is the good news, the gospel, as defined by Paul in [1 Corinthians 15:1-4](#).

No other organization or institution in the world declares, or is charged with declaring, such a message. And that is only fitting since Jesus' kingdom is "not of this world" ([John 18:36](#)). His final recorded words before ascending, as we have seen in this study, were that the

gospel be taken to the entire world.

Today, however, the church is pulled in different directions by a host of causes and issues. Many of these causes and issues involve societal ills, a number of which most certainly should be addressed. The Bible is highly concerned with issues of social justice. Even so, the church must not compromise or forsake its primary mission: to take to a lost and dying world the good news of eternal life available through Jesus.

[Acts 6:1-4](#) is a brilliant example of the tension. Two important social issues loomed: (1) providing food for widows in need and (2) ensuring fairness in the distribution of that food. The Jerusalem church took those issues seriously. But when the apostles said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables" ([6:2](#)), the primary mission remained unchanged. As the church makes disciples who in turn make disciples, then the church is accomplishing its primary mission.

The locations mentioned in [Acts 1:8](#) can provide a model for any church's evangelistic strategy. A congregation must first seek to reach its own surroundings, but it must not be satisfied with that. The people must be challenged to expand the church's outreach. That involves thinking globally. Support

through prayer, financial resources, and personal involvement will be the result.

A book title from several years ago stated an important truth: *Disciples Are Made, Not Born*. For a church to present itself as an attractive place to put one's membership is relatively easy. For a church to commit to making disciples is an entirely different matter. A church must strive always and consciously to keep the main thing the main thing. The head of the church, Jesus Christ, has given the church its marching orders. Those orders have never been amended. The issue is whether the church needs to amend its priorities. Thus it bears repeating: *the most important tasks the church can do are those that only the church can do*.

B. Prayer

Father, may we give the words of Jesus the attention they (and he) deserve. We pray your help to keep us focused on the Great Commission we have. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Jesus' last words before ascending must be the church's first priority always.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with NIV Bible Student

Into the Lesson

To every pair of participants, give one index card on which you have printed a story of personal tragedy or crisis. (Examples of tragedies: loss of job, cancer diagnosis, runaway child, loss of home, bankruptcy, divorce). Be sensitive to any recent tragedies a class member has experienced and avoid using that category.

Ask one member of each pair of learners to imagine going to a friend who has experienced the tragedy on the card. Ask, "How would you counsel without giving advice?" After a few minutes, reassemble the class for reactions. Possible discussion starters:

- 1—How confident were you in offering counsel?
- 2—What is most difficult for you to do when comforting a friend who has experienced a tragedy or crisis?

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "Now What?" activity from the reproducible page, which you can download. Have students work together to complete as indicated.

After either activity say, "Some events

are so overwhelming that we are not sure what to do next! After the resurrection, Jesus gave the disciples clear directions about their next steps.”

Into the Word

Divide students into groups of three to five. Give each group copies of the lesson’s Scripture text. Also give each group a handout (you create) with these instructions for all groups: “Read the text and write the table of contents to a book called *What to Do and Not Do Until Jesus Returns*. Your table of contents should reflect a book of at least three chapters, depending on how you think the texts of [Matthew 28:16–20](#) and [Acts 1:6–8](#) should be approached. The entries for your table of contents will be the chapter titles in the book. Typically, such titles summarize a chapter’s contents with just a few words.”

Give as few hints as possible, but as many as necessary using elements of the following possible outline:

Chapter 1

The Authority’s Identity, Clearly
Established

([Matthew 28:16–18](#))

Chapter 2

The Authority’s Directive, Clearly Defined
([Matthew 28:19, 20](#))

Chapter 3

The Authority’s Plan, Clearly Stated
([Acts 1:6–8](#))

Have groups summarize their work in whole-class discussion. Ask these questions to probe deeper: 1-If we were to ask unbelievers what they think the task(s) of the church should be, how might they respond? 2-Why is that question important or unimportant?

Option. Follow the above by distributing copies of the “Translation, Please!” activity from the reproducible page to study pairs to be completed as indicated.

Make a transition to the Into Life segment by saying, “In leaving earth, Jesus gave his followers a clear commission—commands for the next steps to take until he returns. Let’s look to see how well we are doing in keeping the main thing the main thing.”

Into Life

Put these two phrases on the board as column headers: *What the Church Preaches / What the Church Does*. Brainstorm entries for the two columns. After two lists are compiled, ask the class to evaluate which items on the list should be marked **P**primary, **S**secondary, and **N**onessential. Continue brainstorming steps to take to keep the main thing the main thing.