

What's Your Type?

Exploring Matthew's Gospel

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“Go into all the world and make disciples of all nations...”

Matthew 28:18

Prayer of Preparation

In the name of the living God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we pray. Amen.

Message

I think I was twelve years old when a missionary came to speak at our church. I was fascinated. Here was a person who committed her life to Christ in a way that I had not known. She was serving in a land far away, in Liberia in Africa, and she spoke of following Jesus in that place of the world. She faced all kinds of challenges, but she was faithful in how she was living out the gospel. I thought to myself, “So that is what a disciple of Jesus does.”

Move ahead another seven years and I was at the University of Evansville. I was in a class on church history, and I was learning about a person by the name of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. I had not heard of him until I read his little book called *The Cost of Discipleship*. He wrote that book at the height of what many historians call the “German Church Struggle” when so many Christians at that time gave their allegiance to Adolf Hitler and not the gospel. Bonhoeffer realized early on the danger of what was happening, and he was one of few who spoke out, eventually facing execution in a concentration camp.

The experience of the missionary at age twelve, and the reading of Bonhoeffer's book at age nineteen, impressed upon me the fact that there were people who really did what Jesus said. They very much picked up their cross and followed him (Mt. 16:24). Discipleship truly mattered.

Last week, Pastor Jenothy spoke with us about what it means to follow Jesus, focusing on the Gospel of Mark. She mentioned some of the distinctive aspects of Mark's views of discipleship. In Mark's Gospel, the power of the Holy Spirit inspires disciples to carry out things like crossing social boundaries to reach those on the margins, speaking in different tongues, creating new ministries, healing the sick, and proclaiming the good news to all creation (Mk. 16:20). The disciples always seem to be in a hurry and a flurry as they go from place to place, empowered by God's presence.¹

Indeed, if you have taken the survey in the book *Gospel Discipleship*, and you came out as a Markan disciple, you might feel energized with these characteristics of discipleship. You are in the Spirit with Jesus.²

Introducing Matthew's Vision of Discipleship

This week, as part of our learning the different "discipleship types," we want to concentrate on the Gospel of Matthew. Here, we read another angle on what matters with respect to being a disciple: for example, we learn at the end of this Gospel that what is important to Jesus is how we are to go into the world and make more disciples, teaching and baptizing, and then obeying all that Jesus commanded. Disciples do what Jesus says.

It is why if you scored high on Matthew, you notice that there is a great deal of emphasis on "getting things done," or in the words of the Nike commercial, "just doing it." Disciples here have a "rubber hits the road" mindset. Indeed, they might echo the former Lee Iaccoca's motto of "lead, follow, or get out of the way." It might sound a bit harsh, but if you are a Matthean disciple sitting in a meeting, and people keep on talking and talking, you might wonder if you are wasting your time because no one seems to be doing anything!³ It is also why if you want to get a project completed, you ask someone who has a Matthean bent. Mattheans tend to be highly organized, and they like to see things accomplished, checking things off their "To do list."

These are typically the characteristics of a person who scores high as a part of this type: he or she views the church as a mission outpost, or as a community

¹ See Jenothy Irvine's sermon "What's Your Type? Being a Markan Disciple" from January 23, 2022, based on Mark 16:14-20 at www.franklingrace.org.

² See Michell Morris, *Gospel Discipleship* (Nashville, TN, 2021),

³ Ibid., 35.

where disciples do the things Jesus did, like feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the imprisoned, giving drink to the thirsty, welcoming the stranger (Mt. 25:31-46).

Matthean disciples focus on mission or on serving others. Indeed, that is how the Gospel of Matthew ends (as we read) – with what many people call the Great Commission; the mission of the church is to go into the whole world to share the gospel with all people. Again, look at the verbs like “go,” “teach,” “preach,” “make,” “baptize.” Action oriented. We are not here to sit around and rest on our laurels. No, we are here to carry out a mission. We are here as fellow learners to understand what Jesus is all about and who he is. Therefore, no matter who you are, you have a job to do – to take part in Jesus’ work.

Following the New Moses

If this sounds cut and dry, it is. We need to remember that Matthew is writing his Gospel to three different people-groups in his church and community: 1) to Jews who are struggling with the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE by the Romans and who are seeking the Messiah, 2) to Jewish Christians who have converted to the gospel from Judaism, and 3) to Gentile Christians, who have left paganism.

Matthew wants each of these groups to know (in no uncertain terms) that to follow this Jesus, they will need to come to grips with how he is the New Moses who gives a new law of righteousness and love. They need to understand that Jesus did not come do abolish the law but to fulfill it (Mt. 5:17). Matthew, of course, draws heavily from the Old Testament, and he speaks of Jesus as sharing this new law from a mountain, just as Moses did. That is what the Sermon on the Mount is all about: it is a kind of training manual for practicing Jesus’ new commandments, these new laws, or teachings.

That’s an important point: it is important because it is in church where we learn to practice these new commandments, for example, where we learn to carry each other’s burdens (Mt. 11:3), and where we learn to forgive each other (18:21-22). The Sermon on the Mount contains those teachings where we learn that we cannot serve two masters of God and mammon (Mt. 6:24), and where we learn to turn the other cheek (5:38); we learn how we are to pray not just for ourselves, but for our enemies (5:43-47), and about the futility of worry (5:25-34) and earthly

treasures (6:19-21). In the Sermon on the Mount, we learn that we are to be salt and light in this world (5:13-14), and not judge others (7:1-5).

There is more, of course, like the Beatitudes, but Jesus reminds us that true change really begins on the inside and leads to faithful obedience on the outside (Mt. 7:15-20). Jesus is not only concerned about what we do; he is also concerned with what we say and think (5:27-28). After all, only a good tree can bear good fruit (7:15), and we cannot bear good fruit unless we are connected to him, to the true vine (Jn. 15:1-11). Otherwise, we end up doing our will and not God's will (Mt. 5:10).

Reflection Time

Now, if you are sitting there thinking, "Wow, this is a lot. I cannot possibly be a disciple like this. Maybe I am not cut out to be a Matthean disciple." Well, it is! Mattheans are known to work until they are exhausted. They are known to over volunteer and over commit. And it is why some folks skip over these "hard sayings" of Jesus in this Gospel: they realize it is difficult. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why Dallas Willard, a Christian philosopher, wrote a best-selling book called *The Great Omission*.⁴

In this book, Willard makes the point that, in the churches across the United States, regardless of church title or denominational label, a Great Omission has taken place: churches no longer preach or teach the cost of following Jesus. Churches can quote and throw out all kinds of other Bible verses, but they can leave out what Jesus teaches in the Sermon on the Mount and forget the Great Commission altogether. He says there is a "Great Disparity" in most congregations about what they say and what they don't do. Let me give you an example of what he might mean, especially regarding the Great Commission.⁵

Two weeks on a Zoom call with Bishop Trimble I learned that there are over 4 million people in Indiana who are not connected to a house of worship or a community of faith. I also learned, and I have known this through other surveys like Barna, Pew, and Gallup, that somewhere between 60 and 78 percent of the

⁴ *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus' Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (New York, NY, HarperCollins Publishers, 2006).

⁵ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

people who are not connected to a house of worship or a community of faith, *are* willing to listen to or learn more about the Christian faith.⁶

The problem is that less than two percent of all Christians even talk to someone about faith or their connection to a church, regardless of whether they are Roman Catholic, Protestant, Evangelical, Pentecostal, or Non-Denominational. Now that is a big disparity! It is also a missed opportunity.⁷

I also happen to think that it is a conspiracy of sorts as well, and here is what I mean: for so many years I have heard people quote Saint Francis of Assisi's apparent comment to "Preach the gospel and if necessary, use words," to justify that they only have to be good examples, and not share the gospel verbally. Have you ever heard that saying? Well, the problem is that Saint Francis didn't say this, and the other problem is that Francis often displayed incredible courage preaching the gospel with words, often at the risk of his own life.⁸

In other words, we are here *to offer Christ with words*, and we are here to live as faithful examples! It is both-and. Somewhere along the line we have forgotten that we are to share the gospel in both word and deed.

This might be a clue as to why people like John Wesley and Dietrich Bonhoeffer use the Gospel of Matthew more than any of the other three Gospels – Wesley to address the spiritual laziness of the Church of England, and Bonhoeffer to confront the moral corruption of the German Churches. They understood that there is a cost to discipleship, and they challenged folks with the gospel, with words and with actions, whether in the church or outside the church. No one got a free pass, whether conservative or liberal, whether Protestant or Catholic, English or German. No one has a copyright on Jesus.

Instead, they asked a very simple question: what are you going to do? Are you going to cultivate holy habits or spiritual disciplines, like prayer and fasting and worship, practicing the means of grace, to grow closer to God and carry out the mission, or not?

⁶ Aaron Earls, "Christians Don't Share Faith with Unchurched Friends" in *Insights: Discipleship & Evangelism* (September 9, 2021) at *Life Way Research*.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ See Kevin Cotter, "Did Saint Francis Say, 'Preach the Gospel and If Necessary Use Words?'" (October 11, 2011) at www.focusequip.org/did-francis-really-say-preach-the-gospel-at-all-times-and-if-necessary-use-words.

Closing

Our mission at Grace Church is to care and grow together as disciples of Jesus Christ. That is our aim. That is the goal of worship, of study. It is why we give; it is why we serve. It is why we seek to find ways of shaping people into faithful followers of Christ: to care and grow together.

The good news is that we do not do this alone. Whoever we are, “God is with us,” and wherever we go, God goes with us. When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, we learn that he will be our Emmanuel: the very presence of God with us; and when Jesus commissions the eleven, we hear him say that he will be with us until the end of the age.⁹

As someone who probably leans a great deal in this direction, with this type, I think that this is good news: in fact, it is the best news of all: God is with us.

Now we get to go and do it. Now we go in mission to share – together, and do so in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and Holy Spirit. We go to make disciples. Amen!

⁹ Stanley Hauerwas, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006), 249.