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PREACHING A SERMON SERIES ON BIBLICAL DISCIPLESHIP
FROM THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW AT CHURCH OF THE
OPEN DOOR, FAYETTEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA

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To my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,

Thank you for your love, your righteousness, and the hope of glory.

May you receive all the praise and honor.

To my love, Tracie,

You are a faithful wife, my best friend, and partner in ministry.

I thank the Lord for your dedication and perseverance in the faith.

To my children Jack, Sydney, Aslan, and Eriksson

You are a treasure from the Lord and it is a joy to be your father.

I pray you will always answer the Lord's call: "Follow Me."

To my parents D. Guy and Bonnie Wixtrom,

Thank you for raising me to fear the Lord.

Your living example of discipleship has shaped my faith and ministry.

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PREFACE

“Follow me and I will...” has been the invitation that has summoned Jesus’ disciples since these compelling words first called out to Simon, Andrew, James, and John. These first disciples of Christ followed in the path of the people of God who have faithfully embraced his word and accepted his promises as better than the things of this world. This is our time on the stage of history, and I pray that God will strengthen and enable us to continue to walk in a manner worthy of the calling. I thank God for his call upon my life and the opportunity to serve him and his church. And so I join with Paul in testifying from Acts 20:24, “But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.”

I want to express my thankfulness to Church of the Open Door for calling me as their pastor and walking with me through the completion of this project. Your prayers and encouragement have carried me throughout this project. Furthermore, I want to thank George Council, Don Faircloth, Martin Fisher, Wade Fowler, Ed Green, and Steve Johnson. Your dedicated and faithful service as elders has sharpened me and challenged me. Your collaboration on this project has been invaluable.

Many hours of proofreading and editing were expended during the writing process. I must express my gratitude and great appreciation to Jillian Kidd and

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I have been privileged over the years to serve alongside some of God's servants who have greatly impacted my ministry. I want to say thank you to Tom Loyola and Terry Lowe, who have communicated and exemplified integrity and perseverance in the ministry. Also, I want to say thank you to Aaron Bullian, whose attention to details and servant's heart continue to speak into my ministry. Furthermore, I need to thank my brothers, Karl and Mark Wixtrom, as well as Scott Klemanchuck, Bob Smith, and Maikel Odang. Their wisdom, sarcasm, encouragement, friendship, and faith have helped me through many tough days.

Most of all, I need to say thank you to my partner in life and ministry, Tracie Wixtrom. You are a great treasure from the Lord, and since the day I met you, you have challenged me to love the Lord with all my heart, soul, and strength. Thank you for your encouragement that helped me persevere and complete this project. Your wisdom, love, patience, encouragement, and beauty have been a tangible expression of God's goodness to me and our children.

Jon Lewis Wixtrom

Fayetteville, North Carolina

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to preach a ten-week series of expository messages on biblical discipleship from the Gospel of Matthew at Church of the Open Door in Fayetteville, North Carolina.

Goals

Three goals were put in place to measure the success of this project. The first goal of this project was to evaluate the current understanding of biblical discipleship among the members of Church of the Open Door. This goal was measured by administering the Biblical Discipleship Survey (BDS)¹ to twenty members who were to complete and return the assessment survey. This goal was to be considered successfully accomplished when all twenty members return the completed BDS and the survey had been analyzed to yield a clearer picture of the current understanding and application of biblical discipleship principles at Church of the Open Door.

The second goal of this project was the development of a ten-week expository sermon series on biblical discipleship principles from the gospel of Matthew. This project

¹See appendix 1.

identified ten key discipleship principles from Matthew and developed them into a series of expository messages. These sermons clearly and authoritatively articulated the cost, commitment, and character required for biblical discipleship. The goal was measured by the elders using an evaluation rubric which evaluated the sermon outlines for biblical accuracy, structure, and clarity.² The rubric also gave occasion for the evaluation of the sermon delivery for application, illustration, and communication. The goal was judged successfully accomplished when 90 percent of the evaluated criteria were assessed to be sufficient or exemplary.

The third goal of this project was to be to increase the knowledge of biblical discipleship by delivering a ten week expository sermon series from the gospel of Matthew entitled, “Something to Die For.” The sermon series was delivered on ten consecutive Sunday mornings during the worship hour. This goal was measured by the Sermon Series Knowledge Assessment (SSKA).³ This survey was administered to a group of twenty members in both a pre- and post-sermon series context. The completed, paired assessments measured the change in knowledge and personal commitment to biblical discipleship as a result of the sermon series. This goal was measured by a t-test for dependent samples to demonstrate whether there was a significant positive difference in the pre- and post-series results recorded on the SSKA. A statistical increase would demonstrate an increase in the knowledge of biblical discipleship and conclude that the goal was achieved.

²See appendix 2.

³See appendix 3.

Ministry Context

These goals were pursued through the implementation of the project at Church of the Open Door in Fayetteville, North Carolina. Over the past thirty-seven years, Church of the Open Door has pursued the goals of expository Bible preaching and teaching, Christian fellowship, evangelism, foreign and home missions, as well as a strong youth ministry. The church has a reputation in the Fayetteville community as “the Bible teaching church.” This is an accurate assessment of the present and historical practice of its ministry. There continues to be a strong desire for in-depth Bible teaching and the communication of biblical truth.

Since 1997, Church of the Open Door has been in a slow but steady state of numerical decline which has resulted in a significant reduction in attendance, passionate discipleship, and related ministries. Over the course of these eighteen years, the church has suffered from a lack of consistent pastoral leadership and vision. For much of this time, short-tenured pastorates, long pastoral vacancies, and a contentious congregational atmosphere severely diminished the implementation and reinforcement of biblical discipleship initiatives. Involvement in Sunday school has declined from an average of 453 in 1997 to 88 in 2014. The church saw its AWANA ministry dissolve in 2012 after once hosting over 250 participants. In the past six years we have seen the consolidation of Adult Bible Fellowships that has reflected Church of the Open Door’s downward trend in biblical discipleship. These factors and many other decisions have led to a significant reduction in the church’s ability to fulfill the biblical mandate to engage in biblical discipleship.

Many individual members have a great knowledge of the Scriptures. There is a spiritual depth and maturity among most of the members. However, there appears to be a corporate pattern of indifference toward biblical discipleship mandates that has bred contentment in accomplishments, and this provides little initiative to challenge the status quo. This passivity and maintenance mode of ministry stands in the way of pursuing biblical discipleship. Until the ministry is firmly rooted in biblical discipleship and structured to reflect it, visitors will come and go, maturing the saints in ministry will be hampered, and the reflection of the glory of God in Christ will be impeded through misguided pursuits and goals.

Rationale for the Project

The church's mandate to equip and encourage people in the disciple making process is inherent in its structure and constitution. Jesus left his followers to continue the work that he started and to fulfill the tasks he trained them to carry out. These are clearly detailed in the Great Commission recorded Matthew 28:18-20. In his earthly absence, this divine calling has been entrusted to the church and individuals. The vitality and faithfulness of any believer or church is directly related to the practical outworking of this foundational call to biblical discipleship in life and ministry.

Through the unfolding of this project, core discipleship principles were exegeted from the Gospel of Matthew and publically declared through expository messages, challenging the status quo and encouraging a fresh vision of biblical discipleship. These messages summoned the church to practically reflect biblical discipleship truths, forcing it to reevaluate all church ministries and pursue strategic

application and practical implementation of these truths. This project intended to greatly impact the ministry effectiveness and mission of the church as these discipleship truths begin to refocus and structure the church's ministries, resulting in manifold blessings and spiritual resources as the Lord builds his church through the power of his Spirit

Biblical discipleship was shown to be the *sine qua non* of all believers, needing to be appropriated into every area of life. The calling, cost, commitment, and accompanying consequences of true discipleship challenged individual members to evaluate their devotion and dedication to Christ. This project encouraged a passionate pursuit of incarnating discipleship truths into daily life. The delineation of specific discipleship truths marked the path for obedience and application. The weight and responsibility of Jesus' command were paired with the empowering truth of his enduring presence with them.

Convinced that the Word of God will not return void, these messages brought conviction, confidence, and a clear call for believers to take up their cross and follow him. Both the simplicity of the call and the severity of its demands challenged the believer to confront the individual demands of biblical discipleship. The intended result of this project was the undergirding of Church of the Open Door with a solid foundation for kingdom ministry. The church was presented a biblically constructed discipleship emphasis that encouraged and guided each member toward spiritual maturity through obedience. The need for individual and corporate biblical discipleship was firmly established. The glory of God in the face of Christ was pursued throughout the project as the truth of his word was delivered through the intentional application of biblical

discipleship principles into the circumstances of life and the ministry of Church of the Open Door.

Definitions, Limitations, and Delimitations

The following definitions, limitations, and delimitations are important to understand and consider as the project is structured and implemented.

Discipleship. Discipleship is an unrelenting pursuit of complete surrender to the call and person of the Lord Jesus Christ, an unqualified commitment to the Kingdom of God which is demonstrated in faith-directed, costly obedience, and an undeterred resolve to sacrificially serve Christ in the strength and power of his indwelling Spirit. In the words of Geoffrey Kelly, “One must be wholly directed toward Christ, looking neither to law nor to personal piety nor to the world for fulfillment. The following of Christ exacts a single-mindedness in which one’s heart and ambitions are set in Christ alone.”⁴

One limitation for this project is the eleven week time allotment for the completion of this project. Several delimitations are important to understand. First, the scope of the project is delimited to the members and ministry of Church of the Open Door. Second, the biblical discipleship principles will be delimited to Scripture passages from the Gospel of Matthew. Also, the Biblical Discipleship Survey and the Sermon Series Knowledge Assessment will be delimited to a group of twenty members of Church of the Open Door.

⁴Geoffrey Kelly, *Liberating Faith* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 44.

Research Methodology

The project was designed to challenge the members and ministry of Church of the Open Door to a passionate pursuit of obedience to the demands of biblical discipleship from Matthew's gospel. As stated in the goals section of this project there were three defined goals with each one requiring a research instrument.⁵

The first goal was to assess the current knowledge of biblical discipleship within the membership through the administration of the Biblical Discipleship Survey (BDS).⁶ The BDS consisted of a three page survey utilized a six-point Lickert scale and included several questions requiring a written response. The survey gathered demographic information, measured an individual's knowledge of biblical discipleship, and ascertained information regarding the practical application of biblical discipleship throughout the ministries of the church. The BDS was given to a group of twenty members who were recruited by open invitation during the first week of the project. The data was compiled and analyzed to develop a clear picture of the current understanding and application of biblical discipleship principles at Church of the Open Door.

The second goal required the elders of Church of the Open Door to utilize an evaluation rubric to measure the sermon outline and delivery.⁷ This evaluation tool guided them to assess the outline for biblical accuracy, clear structure, and simple clarity,

⁵All research instruments used in this project were administered in compliance with and approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Research Ethics Committee prior to any utilization in the ministry project.

⁶See appendix 1.

⁷See appendix 2.

as well as the sermon for illustration, application, and communication. The rubric allowed the elders to evaluate the sermon outline and delivery with a four category assessment. The sermon outlines were presented to the elders during weeks one to three for assessment and evaluation.

The third goal utilized the Sermon Series Knowledge Assessment (SSKA).⁸ This twenty question assessment, utilizing a six-point Lickert scale, was distributed to a group of twenty members who completed the pre-sermon series assessment during week 1. A numbering system was employed to give anonymity to the respondents while allowing for the comparison of both assessments from the same individual. The post-sermon series assessment was distributed at the conclusion of the last message during week 11. The SSKA gave a quantitative measurement of the change in knowledge and personal commitment to biblical discipleship as a result of the sermon series. The data from the SSKA was entered into a t-test for dependent samples to measure the statistical difference the sermon series made concerning the member's knowledge and commitment to biblical discipleship.

⁸See appendix 3.

CHAPTER 2

MATTHEW'S BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL JUSTIFICATION FOR DISCIPLESHIP

Matthew introduces his gospel with “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.”¹ This opening statement is then unpacked and culminates with the uniqueness of Jesus’ true identity highlighted in Matthew 1:16, “and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, *who is called Christ*” (emphasis mine). As Matthew unfolds the birth narrative of Jesus, he starts with the theologically focused name, Jesus Christ. Matthew expands on this designation by detailing his divine origin. He writes that Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit in Matthew 1:18 and 20. Also, he bore not just the name “Jesus” but was the one in whom the meaning of the common name “Jesus” would be fulfilled. Furthermore, Matthew clearly states, “He will save his people from their sins” (Matt 1:21).

These statements are followed by a declaration of prophetic fulfillment that adds further confirmation of the ontological significance of this child by designating him as “Immanuel (which means, God with us)” (Matt 1:23). Matthew confirms the identity of Jesus Christ, who is truly Immanuel, with the testimony he records in Matthew 2:2 of the wise men from the east inquiring, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?

¹All Scripture references are from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” Weaving together both prophecy and supernatural cosmic events, the wise men bring themselves to honor the king with their worship. This Jesus, who is the Christ, is one to be pursued for the purpose of worship. This pattern presented in Matthew 2 represents the course of all humanity; some will be drawn to worship while others will be entrenched as enemies of the king who is “God with us.”

Furthermore, Matthew, by including the baptismal account of Jesus, allows for the testimony of John the Baptist and ultimately the voice of God himself to give additional and authoritative attestation to Jesus’ identity. Matthew describes the heavens as being opened, the Spirit of God descending, and the voice of God declaring, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Matt. 3:17). Jesus is clearly presented as the promised Messiah who, beyond all expectations, is the incarnated Son of God.

In the first verses of Matthew 4, Jesus is confronted with the temptation of Satan. By utilizing the word of God he sets aside the value of physical comforts and earthly possession while clearly proclaiming the worship of God as the greatest privilege and demonstrating obedience as the greatest pursuit. The kingdoms of the earth and their glory are Satan’s greatest possession, but he would give them all away in exchange for Jesus’ worship. In a single statement, citing Deuteronomy 6:13, Jesus set aside all earthly pursuits and established “worship” as the ultimate prize. He declared, “Be gone, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve’” (Matt 4:10). Here one can see an example of Jesus’ steadfast obedience which allowed him the means, perfect righteousness, to fulfill the law and provide for sinful humanity a

a source of satisfaction, Jesus' own work, for their individual obligation to obedience, worship, and service to God.

Only through understanding the person of Jesus Christ will one be able to understand Matthew's intention and emphasis. The inclusion of these genealogical facts, birth narrative, the testimony of the wise men, baptismal events, and temptation narrative leads us to a clear understanding of the identity of Jesus, both personally and positionally.

This understanding is then applied to all mankind through the preaching of Jesus when he declares in Matthew 4:17, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." This is the message of the God-man, the Savior of the world, the anointed king of the Jews, who is God's son, bringing covenantal fulfillment to Israel and blessing to the world. He possesses authority and warrants worship. The message is simple, the meaning is supernatural, and the mandate is to align oneself with his authority and thereby surrender to the King of Heaven. Those seven Greek words that make up Jesus' message comprise a call to submit to the plan of God and allow the implications of his divine authority to dramatically alter the course of one's life. The understanding of Jesus' true identity and positional authority paves the way for his clarion call to surrender, worship, and discipleship that is echoed throughout Matthew's gospel.

Matthew 4:12-22

Matthew utilizes Isaiah's prophecy to introduce and launch forth Christ's transformational ministry as the orchestrated and long-predicted plan of God. It promises that darkness will be penetrated with a piercing light and the shadows of death will be confronted with the dawning of a new light. Lenski remarks,

The figure is that of a glorious sunrise after a black and deadly night. In both the prophecy and its fulfillment we must not miss the strong note of undeserved grace. The people were at their lowest ebb, all spiritual light was gone, there was absolutely no hope or help in themselves; then God stepped in and in pure grace sent them a heavenly gift, the help of salvation in Christ Jesus.²

The fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy here and the other fulfillments referenced in Matthew's gospel beckon one to embrace the ministry of Christ as the pivotal event of God's revelation and history. Matthew's words highlight the expectancy and hope of the promised One. Jesus' earthly ministry is introduced with prophecy followed by his divine declaration, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

In saying this, Jesus focused his message and ministry on the supernatural infusion of a heavenly reality into earthly realms, which demands a response from individuals. The gospel, in its essence, is the proclamation of the good news of the dawning of God's rule.³ What was once expressed through the Law and its ordinances was now personally present and demanding submission. The drawing near of the kingdom is the ground (*γὰρ*, "for") of the call to repentance and as such is more important than the call to repentance.⁴ The kingdom of God is at hand!⁵ How near is it? Carson insightfully explains, "The kingdom is still future. But the separate contexts of the

²R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel* (Columbus, OH: The Wartburg Press, 1943), 167.

³Donald A Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 33A (Dallas: Word, 1993), 74.

⁴Ibid.

⁵See R. T. France's discussion of Matthew's stylistic peculiarity utilizing "kingdom of heaven" where the other synoptics prefer the "kingdom of God." R. T. France in *The Gospel According to Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1985), 45-46.

announcements made by John and by Jesus (3:2; 4:17) show that with Jesus the kingdom has drawn so near that it has actually dawned.”⁶ This truth has been clearly established by Matthew in the preceding verses of his gospel. Nolland adds concerning the kingdom’s arrival,

At the very least we are to understand that God has now acted to set in process advance arrangements for the coming of the kingdom. At least in terms of this preparatory activity, if not in some larger sense, things were now on the move in relation to God’s rule. Clearly it is the conviction of the Matthean John and Jesus that the way in which the coming rule of God would impact individuals depended heavily on how they were prepared to relate themselves already now to what was coming.⁷

Herein lies the importance to answering the call for repentance. For the clarion call to repentance was an invitation to surrender to the dawning of the kingdom.

Discipleship finds its place in Jesus’ ministry immediately following the proclamation of his message. The word of Jesus goes forth and it inherently demands a decision from the hearer. It is important to note that discipleship is instituted by the will and intention of Jesus himself. Matthew makes this clear by showing Jesus’ initiation of conversation which is then followed by a clear call to Simon and Andrew, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matt 4:19).

This is repeated a second time in Jesus’ conversation with James and John in verse 21. Jesus himself bears the responsibility for the process as is indicated by the call itself. He is the one who is crafting and fashioning the heart and faith of those who will

⁶D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in vol. 8 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 117.

⁷John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2005), 176.

humbly submit to his call, “Follow me and *I will . . .*” (emphasis mine). Jesus’ call was clear and plain, enlisting those who would surrender their lives and the capacity of their human will to his leadership and direction.

The calling of these four individuals to discipleship summarizes the life of all who will come to faith and follow as a disciple. France states, “these four are intended to be taken as typical of the disciple group.”⁸ The compelling authority of Jesus, his clear demand, and his convincing promise establish the foundational point from which all disciples begin their discipleship pursuits. All who would follow him must surrender to who he is and what he demands. Blomberg comments, “Calling Peter, Andrew, James, and John anticipates Matthew’s intense interest in discipleship. A focus on Christology and discipleship accounts for a substantial portion of what appears in 4:16–16:20.”⁹

However, in the Scriptures we see those who, through amazement and awe, are attracted to Jesus for what he can do or provide. At times these are described as “disciples” and are also characterized as departing from him, disappointed and disillusioned, because they followed him with an earthly, personal motivation. True discipleship involves the hearing of Jesus’ call which necessitates a deliberate response. The imperious call and the radical response are appropriate to the approach of the kingdom of heaven.¹⁰ In the lives of these fishermen, the call of Christ demanded total

⁸France, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 103.

⁹Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary, vol. 22 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 90.

¹⁰Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 178.

and complete abandonment of their earthly livelihood and families, nothing short of complete surrender. Disciples “left” their world to follow him in and for his kingdom.

Therefore the call is one to imitate and replicate the works of Jesus, a true following of him. Nolland points ahead to Matthew 4:23 to give understanding of the activities that will be taken up by the disciples. He writes, “what is in view is an apprenticeship which prepares these men for carrying out the same activity as Jesus himself.”¹¹ With this understanding, Jesus’ ministry will enlist, equip, and empower a group of individuals to carry forth God’s covenant plans and purposes. France writes, “For the result of Jesus’ ministry was the creation of a community of those who responded to his message. There is evidence in Matthew that it was not only in Jesus himself, but also in this disciple group, in distinction from unbelieving Israel, that the true people of God was now to be found.”¹²

The call also carried with it an obligation of Jesus himself to fulfill his calling in their lives and produce a transformation so profound it would characterize a new way of life for the disciples. In this regard, the call becomes a promise with a new commission. They will not go back but rather their lives will be marked by a new pursuit as a result of their submission to his calling. This new pursuit finds direction in following Christ but has as its focus the personal task of reaching individuals with the message of the kingdom. Lenski notes, “This call is for the sake of others, ἄνθρωποι, “men,” human

¹¹Ibid., 179.

¹²France. *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 53.

beings.”¹³ France adds, “Jesus calls his disciples not only to listen and learn, but to take an active part as fishers of men. Jeremiah 16:16 had spoken of fishing for men, but this was to catch them for judgment (cf. Am. 4:2); Jesus’ ‘fisherman’ will save men from judgment.”¹⁴ The call to discipleship is individual in nature but carries with it many implications for others and the kingdom of God.

Matthew 5:1-16

The extent of change demanded in the new life of a disciple is established in the unearthly values of the Kingdom of Heaven. Matthew quickly moves from the content of Jesus’ message, the calling of his first disciples, and a summary of Jesus’ ministry to his longest discourse concerning the character, action, and disposition of a true disciple. Kingdom values, rewards, and results are delineated by Jesus and propositionally put forward to challenge individuals with these unmistakable kingdom attitudes. Matthew, in recording Jesus’ words, is not conveying the Beatitudes in the context of practical wisdom but rather is clearly establishing them in “the context of eschatological proclamation.”¹⁵ Jesus is continuing to carry forth his message, Repent! Surrender your mind, desires, and pursuits of this world, for the kingdom of God is at hand. These attitudes are set forth with the Greek word μακάριος, which is often translated as “blessed” or “happy.” In classical Greek the word μακάριος, is used to

¹³Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel*, 170.

¹⁴France, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 104.

¹⁵Friedrich Hauek, “μακάριος,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964; Logos Bible Software), 4:367.

describe the happy state of the gods above earthly sufferings and labours.¹⁶ The New Testament understanding of *μακάριος* carries forth the classical understanding but pulls it down into the human realm. In this realm, *μακάριος* refers “overwhelmingly to the distinctive religious joy which accrues to man from his share in the salvation of the kingdom of God.”¹⁷ With this understanding, the “blessing” is not earned as a result of the attitude but rather is derived from the eschatological understanding that has produced it. It is this same eschatological focus that continues to demand its conveyance. France states,

‘Blessed’ is a misleading translation of *makarios*, which does not denote one whom God blesses. . . . It introduces someone who is to be congratulated, someone whose place in life is an enviable one. ‘Happy’ is better than ‘blessed’, but only if used not of a mental state but of a condition of life. ‘Fortunate’ or ‘well off’ is less ambiguous. It is not a psychological description, but a recommendation.¹⁸

These discipleship qualities arise out of one’s surrender to the reality of kingdom of God and should be incarnated into the life of the believer leaving them transformed in their thoughts and affections.

In Matthew 5:3 Jesus begins his list of eight qualities that are reflective of kingdom values. These qualities establish criteria for identifying a true disciple: “Blessed are the poor in spirit Blessed are they that mourn Blessed are the meek Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness Blessed are the merciful Blessed are the pure in heart Blessed are the peacemakers Blessed are

¹⁶Ibid., 362.

¹⁷Ibid., 367.

¹⁸France, *Gospel According to Matthew*, 108-9.

those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake." France writes, "The beatitudes thus outline the attitudes of the true disciple, the one who has accepted the demands of God's kingdom, in contrast with the attitudes of the 'man of the world'; and they present this as the best way of life not only in its intrinsic goodness but in its results."¹⁹ Lloyd-Jones adds to this understanding of a genuine disciple by stating,

The truth is that the Christian and the non-Christian belong to two entirely different realms the first thing you have to realize about yourself is that you belong to a different kingdom. You are not only different in essence; you are living in two absolutely different worlds. You are in this world; but you are not of it. You are among those other people, yes; but you are citizens of another kingdom. This is the vital thing that is emphasized everywhere in this passage.²⁰

The beatitudes define kingdom attitudes and understanding. Although all the beatitudes can be said to involve implicit commands, this aspect of the beatitudes is decidedly secondary to the clear and grace-filled affirmation of the deep happiness of the recipients of the kingdom.²¹

Jesus, in declaring these beatitudes, is extending an invitation to experience the true joy of kingdom living with the certainty of a favorable result. This assurance of the future is meant to transform their present existence.²² The emphasis of these beatitudes is on the certainty that discipleship will not be in vain.²³ Disciples are already enjoying kingdom benefits and will receive an eternal inheritance when the kingdom of God is

¹⁹Ibid., 109.

²⁰D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1976), 30.

²¹Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 91.

²²Ibid., 96.

²³France. *Gospel According to Matthew*, 109.

fully realized. Blomberg comments, “In the first and last beatitudes, Jesus declares God’s kingdom to be present for those who are blessed. In the intervening verses he refers to future consolation. Partial recompense may come in this age, but complete fulfillment of Jesus’ promises often requires waiting for the age to come.”²⁴ France concurs adding, “The rewards of discipleship are therefore spelt out in the second half of each verse. The tenses are future, except in the first and last, indicating that the best is yet to come, when God’s kingdom is finally established and its subjects enter into their inheritance.”²⁵

These guarantees are crucial to the life of the disciple. The predominating estimation of the kingdom of God carries with it a reversal of all customary evaluations.²⁶ In living them out, the kingdom of this world is surrendered and exchanged for the kingdom of heaven. Weber agrees: “Jesus came extending an invitation to enter into the kingdom of heaven and called his disciples to incarnate these kingdom values. Jesus identified kingdom servants as those who, by outward circumstances, were to be most pitied, but who, according to present and future reality, were to be most envied.”²⁷

Therefore, these standards are defined by the kingdom and thereby must condition those who will receive it. Friedrich Hauek states, “In all these verses the light of future glory shines over the sorry present position of the righteous. Thus the New Testament beatitudes are not just intimations of the future or consolations in relation to it.

²⁴Blomberg, *Matthew*, 97-98.

²⁵France, *Gospel According to Matthew*, 109.

²⁶Hauek, “μακάριος”, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 4:368.

²⁷Stuart K. Weber, *Matthew*, Holman New Testament Commentary, vol. 1 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 58.

They see the present in the light of the future.”²⁸

The reality of the kingdom of heaven, lived out in the lives of true disciples, will impact the world in powerful ways. As disciples interface and engage the earthly realms, their distinctive character will bring disruption and definition to earthly matters. Moreover, the faithful witness of a disciple will infuse kingdom realities into the fallen world on account of their relationship with Christ.

Matthew moves from the establishment of the character qualities in Matthew 5:1-12 to the impact they must have in the world in verses 13-16. Lloyd-Jones comments, “We pass, therefore, from the contemplation of the character of the Christian to a consideration of the function and purpose of the Christian in this world in the mind and the purpose of God.”²⁹ Disciples are compelled to witness these kingdom realities in such a way that sets the kingdom values in stark relief against the prevailing earthly ideals. In such a way, Jesus describes the impact of the disciples as reflecting the transformational qualities of salt and light. Both of these examples bring benefit to a situation while utilizing their intrinsic qualities to restrain.

In saying, “you are the salt of the earth” (Matt 5:13), Jesus is drawing upon the qualities of the kingdom that will bring the hope of longevity and usefulness to the earthly situation as they are lived out by the disciples. Jesus highlights the fact that a disciple must persevere in faithfulness to the kingdom call if they are to fulfill their purpose. Failure will result in the loss of effectiveness and usefulness as is pictured in the

²⁸Hauek, “μακάριος”, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 4:369.

²⁹Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, 129.

discarding of degraded salt in verse 13, “It is no longer good for anything.” Carson concludes, “The point is that, if Jesus’ disciples are to act as a preservative in the world by conforming to kingdom norms, if they are ‘called to be a moral disinfectant in a world where moral standards are low, constantly changing, or non-existent . . . they can discharge this function only if they themselves retain their virtue.’”³⁰

In the example of light, illumination and illustration arise as the prescribed impact of the disciple’s witness. First, the interaction of kingdom realities in the world will bring illumination by demonstrating the very presence of God. Hagner writes,

It is essential that we bear in mind both aspects of this matter. As those who believe the gospel we have received light and knowledge and instruction. But, in addition, it has become part of us. It has become our life, so that we thus become reflectors of it. The remarkable thing, therefore, of which we are reminded here, is our intimate relationship with Him. The Christian is a man who has received and has become a partaker of the divine nature. The light that is Christ Himself, the light that is ultimately God, is the light that is in the Christian.³¹

It is the nature of God in us that radiates light, dispelling the darkness of this world. The disciple who is visibly distinctive from other men will have an effect on them.³²

Secondly, the illumination brings forth the great illustration of God at work in and through the life of the disciple. The challenge is to live out in the public arena what one is intrinsically.³³ The disciple must reflect Christ in practical ways before the watching world and thereby give opportunity for all observers, even those currently in darkness, to find an opportunity to glorify God. Nolland writes, “That to which the

³⁰Carson, *Matthew*, 139.

³¹Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 142.

³²France, *Gospel According to Matthew*, 112.

³³Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 214-15.

Matthean Jesus calls is neither private nor to be ghettoized in the Christian community....
The outcome is to be that people are impressed by what God is currently doing.”³⁴

In Matthew 5:1-16 Jesus distinctively lays forth the characteristics of his genuine disciples. Their identity is unmistakable and their inheritance is certain, secure in the eternal kingdom but shining forth in profound ways in this present world. True discipleship always stands to testify to the reality of Christ and thereby impacting this world through distinctive actions for the kingdom of heaven and the glory of God.

Hagner summarizes well Jesus’ words here:

The disciples—the blessed recipients of the kingdom—are thus of vital importance for the accomplishment of God’s purpose in the world. They constitute the salt and light without which the earth cannot survive and remains in darkness. This mission is accomplished, however, not only in word but in the deeds of their daily existence. Others observing their conduct will know that the priorities of these persons have changed—that before them is something of inestimable value, something that gives light and results in the glorifying of God.³⁵

In a similar fashion, Wright concludes that Jesus is laying the foundation of a new covenant people who will carry forth the mission of God. He writes,

The imagery chosen by Jesus undoubtedly echoes the task given by YHWH to Israel that they were to be “a light to the nations.” And in the context of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus’ purpose is to portray the quality of life, character, and behavior of those who constitute the new covenant people of God being formed around himself as the messianic Servant King. Just as Israel should have let its light shine as an attraction to the nations . . . so the disciples of Jesus must let the light of good works shine in such a way that people will come to glorify the living God. The missional purpose of Jesus’ ethical teaching is clear.”³⁶

³⁴Ibid., 215.

³⁵Hagner, *Matthew 1 -13*, 102.

³⁶Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2006), 391.

Matthew 8:5-13

Matthew, having concluded the Sermon on the Mount with the closing verses of chapter 7, highlighted the authority that Jesus manifested in the depth and manner of his teaching. Matthew immediately moves into chapters 8 and 9 to establish the full extent of Jesus' authority. He utilizes numerous healing and miracle stories which are interspersed with a discussion of discipleship (8:18-22), Matthew's own call to discipleship, pointed discipleship questions (9:9-17), and concludes with Jesus' teaching about the need for workers for the harvest (9:35-38). These chapters give us some details of Jesus' personal ministry, summarized in Matthew 4:23-25. In the first stories recorded in chapter 8, Matthew establishes "submissive faith" as the necessary and only effective response to Jesus' authority.

Matthew begins chapter 8 with two stories that involve a clear demonstration of submission and faith. In both of these situations, Jesus is addressed as "Lord." Blomberg highlights the fact that, "like the leper, the centurion approaches Jesus with remarkable respect. He submissively calls him 'Lord.'"³⁷ This title, although not establishing a declaration of deity, possesses a much stronger meaning than the often translated, "sir." Hagner writes, "While the centurion may not have shared the high Christology of the Matthean community, he still probably meant more than merely "sir" when he addressed Jesus as κύριε. He at least regarded Jesus as a person uniquely endowed by God with authority, if not sovereignty, over the physical realm."³⁸ The

³⁷Blomberg, *Matthew*, 140.

³⁸Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 203-4.

teaching in both of these instances is clear: the inherent authority of Jesus, submissively approached, acknowledged, and appealed to by faith will find satisfaction. Thus, it will avail an individual the opportunity to experience the application of this authority for the satisfaction of his need.

The road to discipleship and blessing runs through this submissive faith, proving in practical ways the authoritative teaching of Jesus. These miracles serve as concrete examples, in both the cases of the leper and the centurion, of the kingdom character that was established in the Beatitudes. “Here was one who was in the state described in the first clauses of the ‘Beatitudes,’ and to whom came the promise of the second clauses; because Christ is the link between the two.”³⁹ This line of humility and dependence is carried further in this account in the declaration of the centurion in verse 8, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed.” In this situation, the authoritative teaching of Jesus is acknowledged verbally and will be proven through the manifested results.

Therefore, seeing Jesus’ authority and acknowledging it, led to a direct appeal arising out of his own faith in that authority. This is the pattern of true discipleship. The centurion appeals to Jesus in faith, desperately clinging to his authority. Lenski writes, “The request to save the servant from death and to do that by merely uttering a word implies divine omnipotence on the part of Jesus. The centurion thus reveals his conception of Jesus and of any word of command that may come from his lips.”⁴⁰

³⁹Carson, *Matthew*, 201.

⁴⁰Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel*, 327.

As a centurion, he had power and authority delegated to him by the emperor. He understood the far-reaching ramifications of authority. Acknowledging Jesus' authority led the centurion to make the great statement of faith in Matthew 8:8-9, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. And I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another 'Come,' and he comes, and to my servant, 'Do this.' And he does it." Morris surmises, "This man's reply shows that he had an unusual understanding that Jesus spoke with the authority of God. He would accordingly be obeyed. Though he speaks humbly, the officer shows that he is well aware of what authority means."⁴¹

The authority vested in Jesus was a familiar construction to the centurion. Understanding authority helped him to look beyond just the authority to request the application of his possessed power. Hagner envisions the centurion's understanding by stating, "As the orders of the centurion are obeyed, whatever they may be, so must the orders of Jesus be obeyed—a view that indicates belief in the messianic authority and status of Jesus."⁴²

Faith needs to be understood in the present context. France writes, "Faith should not be interpreted here in the light of later theological discussion; it is defined by vv. 8-9 as an absolute practical reliance on Jesus power."⁴³

⁴¹Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans: 1992), 193.

⁴²Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 205.

⁴³France, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 155.

Nolland adds, “The kind of faith in view is one that recognizes and responds to what God has now begun to do in Jesus. As in Luke, ‘Faith . . . is attributed to those who act decisively on the basis of the conviction that God’s help is to be found with Jesus and gratefully receive God’s action through him.’”⁴⁴ Faith must be expressed in action motivated by the recognition of and dependence upon real authority. Carson summarizes this understanding by clearly stating,

Precisely because Jesus was under God’s authority, he was vested with God’s authority, so that when Jesus spoke, God spoke. To defy Jesus was to defy God; and Jesus’ word must therefore be vested with God’s authority that is able to heal sickness. This analogy, though not perfect, reveals an astonishing faith that recognizes that Jesus needed neither ritual, magic, nor any other help; his authority was God’s authority, and his word was effective because it was God’s word.⁴⁵

Matthew underscores Jesus’ affirmation of this Gentile’s faith by recording Jesus’ emotional response. Twice in scripture Jesus is characterized as “astonished” or “marveling”. In Mark 6:6 he marvels at the unbelief displayed in Nazareth while here, he marvels at the fervent faith express through the centurion. Carson writes,

The greatness of his faith did not rest in the mere fact that he believed Jesus could heal from a distance but in the degree to which he had penetrated the secret of Jesus’ authority. That faith was the more surprising since the centurion was a Gentile and lacked the heritage of OT revelation to help him understand Jesus. But this Gentile penetrated more deeply into the nature of Jesus’ person and authority than any Jew of his time.⁴⁶

This sequence of events led Jesus to step outside the conversation and utilize the event as a teaching moment for those who followed him. France, noting the importance of this

⁴⁴Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 356.

⁴⁵Carson, *Matthew*, 201-2.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 202.

interchange with his followers, refers to verse 10 as the “key to the whole incident.”⁴⁷

Jesus, utilizing the centurion’s faith declaration, instructs his followers with this impassioned reply, “Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith.” Jesus highlights and reinforces this, because faith is the only means of entrance into the kingdom.

Since the path of discipleship is focused on securing the kingdom, Jesus pauses to clearly mark the path. In doing so, he makes faith the currency of the kingdom’s economy. Surprisingly, it is found in unexpected people and missing from the people in whom the great deposit was made.

Matthew points to the ramifications of this reality in verses 11-13. He designates the eschatological kingdom as a place where the faithful will be gathered. It is not a place determined by nationality or pedigree, but rather secured through the appropriation of faith in what God is doing in Jesus. Hagner writes of the commonly understood approach to the kingdom and its underlying assumptions by stating,

The references concerning the coming of many from east and west (e.g., Ps. 107:3; Isa 43:5; Bar 4:37) were understood as referring to the return of diaspora Jews to Israel. The great family of the covenant people of God would gather with the patriarchs, who symbolize Israel, in the new eschatological kingdom and feast together with them—thus manifesting in this table communion in their oneness. But now with the coming of the Messiah, that exclusivism is turned on its head in an apparent reversal of salvation-history. It is the Gentiles who are being called from the ends of the earth. The centurion represents in effect the beginning of a stream of Gentiles who will come from east and west to join the eschatological banquet, while—and consider the offense of this unparalleled teaching—the Jews, “the sons of the kingdom,” will themselves (in large part, i.e., who reject the Messiah) be rejected.⁴⁸

⁴⁷France, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 155.

⁴⁸Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 205-6.

Entrance into the kingdom is shown to be secured by faith.

Therefore, the path of discipleship must be clearly marked by faith. France states in conclusion, “Thus faith, not race, is the criterion for membership of God’s Kingdom.”⁴⁹ Jesus holds forth this example as a pattern of true kingdom discipleship and “challenged those who should know better to believe as this heathen man believed.”⁵⁰ Affirmation from Jesus and acceptance into his kingdom will come only through faith.

The consequences for those who have been entrusted with the kingdom message, “sons of the kingdom,” and have cultivated a path of unbelief, pride, and rebellion will be excluded from the kingdom. In the words of Jesus in Matthew 8:12, they will be “thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Faith or the lack of it has definite consequences. Nolland comments, “‘Thrown out’ suggests violent exclusion at the time when entrance is sought.”⁵¹ It heightens the example of the centurion and truly sets him up as the true beneficiary of the covenant promises of God.

Matthew is giving clear testimony to the rejection of Jesus by the Jews, as a nation, because of prideful ignorance and unbelief. The results are clearly defined. The faithful inherit the promises, while those in unbelief suffer the loss of all hope and relationship with the king and his promise; experiencing instead pain, torment, and separation in eternal anguish. “Outer darkness, weeping and gnashing of teeth, which

⁴⁹France, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 155-56.

⁵⁰Webber, *Matthew*, 117.

⁵¹Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 357.

were symbolic Jewish descriptions of the fate of ‘the ungodly’ are to be, incredibly, the experience of the ‘sons of the kingdom.’ There could hardly be a more radical statement of the change in God’s plan of salvation inaugurated by the mission of Jesus.”⁵² Carson adds, “But these verses affirm, in a way that could only shock Jesus’ hearers, that the locus of the people of God would not always be the Jewish race. If these verses do not quite authorize the Gentile mission, they open the door to it and prepare for the Great Commission.”⁵³ Augustine saw this broader inclusion and commented in a sermon covering verse 12, “Jesus commends the centurion’s faith, whose flesh was alien but whose spirit was of the household of faith.”⁵⁴ Hendrickson provides a helpful perspective to this passage as a whole by stating, “The words of verses 10-12 were meant not only for the centurion but for all—centurion, his friends, the entire accompanying multitude—in order that all might rivet their main attention on a matter far more important than physical healing, namely, on being saved and living lives to the glory of God.”⁵⁵

The dawning of the kingdom, initiated in the ministry of Jesus, serves to clarify and define the responsibilities of true disciples. Jesus identifies and honors personal faith as a matter of supreme importance. In the closing of this story in Matthew 8:13, Jesus appropriates the centurion’s faith into the requested and expected outcome. Healing comes to the centurion’s servant through the power and authority of the word of Jesus.

⁵²France, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 156.

⁵³Carson, *Matthew*, 203.

⁵⁴Manlio Simonetti, *Matthew 1–13*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture NT, vol. 1a, electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001; Logos Bible Software), 163.

⁵⁵William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*, New Testament Commentary, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2001; Logos Bible Software), 398.

Morris writes, “Here the gift is expressly related to the faith: as you have believed so be it. This probably does not mean that the gift is in proportion to the faith; Jesus does not work that way. We should see rather a causative meaning, ‘Because you have believed.’”⁵⁶

As always, faith must be rightly understood. It is always dependent upon an instrumental object—and this is what delivers the beneficial result. In this light, Weber rightfully notes, “It was not the faith alone that healed the servant, but the fact that the centurion’s faith was placed in a worthy object—the Messiah-King.”⁵⁷ Jesus demands this of all his disciples. You must, by faith, surrender to his authority and draw upon it for the help and favor that brings the blessed results and the promised provisions of eternal hope.

France clearly summarizes this passage of Scripture with these words: “The centurion’s story has thus highlighted faith as the ‘one thing needful’. It is a practical faith which expects and receives results. Such faith renders tradition and heredity meaningless and ‘of such is the kingdom of God.’”⁵⁸ Discipleship is the pursuit of the kingdom of God, which must be approached, appealed to, affirmed, accepted, and must expect divine application in one’s life through faith.

⁵⁶Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 196.

⁵⁷Weber, *Matthew*, 117.

⁵⁸France, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 157.

Matthew 10:26-33

Chapter 10 of Matthew's gospel brings a new dimension to discipleship. This chapter begins with the delegation of kingdom authority from Jesus to his twelve disciples. The kingdom character declared in chapters 5-7 and the demonstration of kingdom authority in chapters 8-9 give disciples practical instruction and experience in what Jesus meant when he said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Matthew writes, "And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction" (Matt 10:1). Each disciple, having answered the call to follow Jesus, is launched forth to personally carry out the proclamation of the in-breaking kingdom through word and deed. Jesus gave them a clear mandate to "Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons" in verse 8 which was joined to Jesus' command in verse 7, "And proclaim as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" Jesus lays out for them the mission and begins to inform them of the awaiting affliction that is certain to find them.

Knowing that this faith endeavor will demand perseverance and end in persecution, Jesus exhorts his disciples to show no fear. This direct challenge to his disciples, "So have no fear of them" (Matt 10:26), becomes the standard by which genuine, faithful disciples of Jesus will approach their obligations. Matthew issues a clarion call for undeterred confidence in the authority of God, the word of God, the power of God, and the promises of God. He lays out this challenge in Matthew 10:26-33 concerning confidence, a brazen lack of fear, that becomes a vital distinction of discipleship.

This call of Jesus to “have no fear of them” is grounded in the authority of God in Jesus. Fear is a natural response but this endeavor reaches well into the supernatural, it concerns the kingdom. France notes that for the disciples, “There are right and wrong fears for the disciple of Jesus, and true discipleship depends on distinguishing them.”⁵⁹ Carr states, “Two reasons against fear are implied: (1) If you fear, a day will come which will reveal your disloyalty; (2) Fear not, for one day the unreality of the things that terrify you will be made manifest.”⁶⁰

“Nothing is covered that will not be revealed” is Jesus’ promise in verse 26 and the assurance of full disclosure gives confidence to those who testify. Jesus is equipping his disciples for the arduous task before them. Carson writes, “The truth must emerge; the gospel and its outworkings in the disciples may not now be visible to all, but nothing will remain hidden forever. And if the truth will emerge at the End, how wise to declare it fully and boldly now.”⁶¹ Morris insightfully comments, “Publicity is an advantage to the good, but it makes things harder for the evil, whose way must be concealed if they are to be successful.”⁶² Therefore Jesus encourages them to take up their calling to be disciples, salt and light from Matthew 5, with confidence and full assurance of vindication.

Jesus moves next to lay out the plans for the public ministry of all disciples.

⁵⁹France, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 185-86.

⁶⁰A. Carr, *The Gospel According to St Matthew*, Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools and Colleges, electronic ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1896; Logos Bible Software), 166.

⁶¹Carson, *Matthew*, 254.

⁶²Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 261.

Being a disciple is a call to testify to what has been received from the Lord. Whereas the unfolding kingdom plan and the eschatological truths of judgment and justification diminish the potency of fear, the authority of the word of God conveys great responsibility to the disciple and demands accountability from the disciple. Carson makes an interesting point in saying, “In a sense the apostles were to have more of a public ministry than Jesus himself. He told them things in private But they were to teach them fully and publically. . . . A necessary criterion for being a disciple of Jesus is to acknowledge him publically.”⁶³ This public acknowledgement is nothing less than the proclamation of the authoritative word of God that has been entrusted to them in private instruction.

In order for the disciples to have a message to proclaim they must first hear from the Lord. Jesus clearly states in verse 27, “What *I tell you* in the dark, say in the light, and what *you hear whispered*, proclaim on the housetops” (emphasis mine). This verse is certainly a forward looking statement from Jesus concerning the Spirit-empowered testimony of the disciples to the nations, but it underscores the disciples’ responsibility to know the word of the Lord and be convinced of its authority. Nolland highlights the present working of the God and the responsibility of the disciple by stating, “Mission participation is likely to be seen not only as underwritten by what God is now involved in but also as an activity for which the disciple is answerable to the judgment of God.”⁶⁴

⁶³Carson, *Matthew*, 254.

⁶⁴Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 436.

God is the active participant in the proclamation of his word, Hagner highlights this in stating,

The gospel, up till now veiled in a degree of secrecy, is to be made clear and plain through the preaching of the disciples and the Church. There is a kind of inevitability about this making known of the gospel through the disciples, witnessed to by the divine passive verbs *αποκαλυφθησεται*, “will be revealed,” and *γνωσθησεται*, “will be make known,” where God is understood as the active agent working through the disciples. This full revelation and “making known” in its contrast to the present time must refer to the Church’s proclamation in the period following the resurrection What Jesus speaks the “in the darkness” (*εν τη σκοτια*) and “in the ear” (*εις το ουζ*), privately among the disciples and in sometimes cryptic language, will be spoken *εν τω φωτι*, “in the light,” and proclaimed *επι των δωμάτων*, “from the rooftops.” Thus the time following the resurrection will be a time of proclamation of the gospel in new strength, clarity, and power.⁶⁵

Jesus sends forth his “apostles,” the disciples who are sent, to herald the message of the kingdom through the proclamation of the word of God and the demonstration of his mighty power.

This commission is followed with another “do not fear” command in verse 28. Understanding that the revelation of the kingdom of God and the clear declaration of the authoritative word of the Lord will incur great hatred and persecution, Matthew records Jesus preemptively warning and encouraging his faithful disciples. He encourages them through the declaration of his mighty power, which alone is to be feared, because it holds command over one’s soul and its eternal estate. Hagner comments, “It is thus God, the final judge of all, and not human beings, who alone is to be feared, that is, to be obeyed and trusted (cf. Ps 33:18) in the completion of the mission.”⁶⁶

⁶⁵Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 285.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 286.

Jesus, in verse 28, highlights his power and the far superior, eternal importance of the soul. In doing so, he implicitly characterized the kingdom of God and its focus as spiritual, although not totally removed from the body; it stands as beyond the physical realm demanding obedience to the call and confidence in his sovereign power. Lenski writes, “To lose the body is to lose little, to lose the soul is to lose all. Here *ψυχή* is in contrast with *σωμὴ* and hence does not mean merely “life” but what the English calls “soul,” the seat and bearer of the spiritual life; and thus in substance it is the same as the *πνεῦμα*.”⁶⁷ Jesus implores his disciples to give attention to their souls and the one who has authority over them. In doing so, they will display the courage necessary for the fulfillment of their commissioned task. Jesus, then, is warning against the tragic error of being constantly filled with fear because of those who are able to kill the body as if the body were more important than the soul.⁶⁸

Jesus holds out one more call to confidence and stark fearlessness in verses 29-31. In verse 31, Jesus extols the value of his disciples in saying, “Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.” Jesus has just explained the Father’s watch-care over what man deems insignificant, the life of a mere sparrow. However, Jesus assures his disciples that not one of those little birds loses its life apart from God’s sovereign will. The Father is passionately concerned with the details of our life and death. This is transferred into the human realm through God’s accounting of the individual hair on one’s head where trivial insignificance is given careful concern and constant attention.

⁶⁷Lenski, *Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel*, 410.

⁶⁸Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*, 471.

As a result of this level of loving concern from our heavenly Father, we must surrender the details and destination of our lives into his loving hands. Nolland writes, “Matthew’s point is not that the soul is deathless, but that only God has the power over it. Fear of God is to displace fear of death-dealing persecutors. The stakes are higher with God.”⁶⁹ This should truly free us from all fear. Lenski highlights this truth in noting,

Note the emphasis on *ὁμείς*, which emphasis is increased by its position. Will God who watches every little sparrow for one moment neglect you who, to use an understatement, excel in value to him any number of sparrows? How simple the facts here put together, and how convincing and satisfying the conclusion that results! Here absolutely every trace of fear should vanish.⁷⁰

Chrysostom, in a homily on Matthew 10:30-31, aptly summarizes the real freedom there is in confident, fearless living that understands God’s sovereign control over every detail of our life. He rightfully concludes,

Therefore, if God both knows all things that happen to us and is able to save us and willing to do so, then whatever we may be suffering, we need not think that God has forsaken us in our suffering. For it is not God’s will to keep us wholly separated from that which elicits dread but rather to persuade us not to make an idol out of whatever we dread. It is this, more than anything else, that constitutes deliverance from dread. “Therefore, don’t be afraid. You are of more value than many sparrows.” Don’t you see that God views your fear with more concern than the lives of many sparrows? He already knows the secrets of your heart. Hence Jesus adds, “Do not fear.” For even if that which you dread prevails, it prevails only over your body; this is the limited part of yourself, which nature will surely take in due time and bring to an end.⁷¹

The reality of our eternal security and the promise of our Father’s intimate, loving concern must cause us to be bold, confident, devoid of all fear in the outworking of his

⁶⁹Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 436.

⁷⁰Lenski, *Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel*, 412.

⁷¹Simonetti, *Matthew 1–13*, 208.

calling upon our lives. Such confidence is a disciple's privilege and obligation.

Jesus returns to the proclamational mandate of verses 26 and 27 and reinforces this discipleship imperative in verses 32 and 33. Jesus states, "So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven." There is a promise and a reward for those who faithfully discharge their discipleship duties. Hagner underscores this responsibility by stating,

The great importance of witness, of carrying the gospel of the kingdom to the world, is now laid out in the strongest of statements. Witness is not optional; it is a requirement. These verses with their combined promise and threat provide further motivational power to the carrying out of the mission, regardless of the experience of hostility and rejection that is encountered.⁷²

France clearly defines the lines of demarcation demanded by a follower of Jesus. He charges, "So the disciple must choose which solidarity he prefers, that with men in this life, or that with Jesus before my Father who is in heaven."⁷³ Our walk of discipleship here on earth has eternal ramifications and one must choose wisely. The choice involves the costly pursuit of discipleship at the expense of one's very life. Persecution, hatred, and death are promised for those who pursue this path. However this path ends with the incredible promise of Jesus that he will give affirmation and acknowledgment before God of every disciple who lives in fidelity and solidarity with him.

Discipleship is a great exchange where the potential and opportunities of this life are exchanged and invested in and for the kingdom of God. Jesus calls us to exhibit

⁷²Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, 287.

⁷³France, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 188.

this in our lives. Disciples must lay down this life, surrender their attachments, and relinquish their fears to avail themselves of the privileged path of being a follower of Jesus. Hendriksen writes,

This path involves an intimate relationship with the one they testify about. The hearts of the disciples must be in their message, that is, they must profess their faith in Christ. Cf. Ps. 66:16. To profess—or “confess”—Christ means to acknowledge him as Lord of one’s life, and to do so openly (“before men”), even in the hearing of those who were opposing him.⁷⁴

Blomberg further adds, “‘Acknowledge’ (*homologeō*) carries the sense of confess or trust in, i.e., to declare one’s allegiance to Christ. In the context of persecution . . . such acknowledgment means remaining faithful to Jesus even if one must die for him. This kind of commitment is not likely to be faked.”⁷⁵ The very demands of the calling will eliminate or eventually expose the uncommitted and faithless.

Jesus is calling each individual disciple to make him the controlling influence in their lives. They must truly be led by him. Carr notes that, *ὁμολογήσει ἐν ἐμοί*, literally, “Confess in me,” carries with it the connotation of, “make me the central point and object of his confession.”⁷⁶ The life of disciple, who by the very definition is a “follower,” must be centered in the person of Jesus Christ. France weaves these passages together by stating, “These verses reinforce the warning of v. 28 that there is a worse fate than human persecution, that is to be repudiated by Jesus himself before the Father A man’s standing before God is thus explicitly made to depend on his relationship to

⁷⁴Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*, 473.

⁷⁵Blomberg, *Matthew*, 179.

⁷⁶Carr, *The Gospel According to St Matthew*, 167.

Jesus, and Jesus himself stands in the role of arbiter of a man's ultimate teaching of Jesus."⁷⁷ One must, therefore, not ignore Jesus' exhortation to his disciples to "fear not what man can do" because in reality, they can do nothing of any lasting consequence.

Finally, in summary, this passage demands from every disciple an unwavering commitment to the authority of God in Jesus, the truth of God's word, the power of God, the watch-care of God, and the promises of Jesus to identify those who have walked in solidarity with him. Fear not!

Matthew 28:16-20

The launching forth of the disciples into ministry in chapter 10 was truly a foreshadowing of what was the ultimate objective in the instruction of the disciples—the continuing proclamation of the kingdom message in the physical absence of the Lord Jesus. What transpired in the intervening chapters of Matthew beginning in chapter 10 to this final passage takes them through their initiation into a public ministry, open rejection and false accusations against Jesus' authority. This leads Jesus to focus his instruction on the disciples through parables, miracles, in depth and illustrated teaching, the events of his passion, and his glorious resurrection which all firmly establish the veracity of his authority. This is vitally important because it is Jesus' authority which is the source of the initial sending of the twelve in Matthew 10⁷⁸ and the means by which the disciples are

⁷⁷France, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 187.

⁷⁸Matt 10:1 "And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them *authority* over unclean spirits. To cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction" (emphasis mine).

commissioned in Matthew 28.⁷⁹ Jesus' words, actions, miracles, prophetic abilities, and resurrection display the reality of and undeniably establish his divine authority. It is real, it is powerful, and it is now apportioned to them for the work of the unfolding kingdom for the glory of God.

The disciples, having obediently followed Jesus' commands to gather on a specific mountain in Galilee, are the recipients of the universal mission commission which is derived from and facilitated through divine authority of the risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Arising out of this assembly are the two seemingly antithetical responses of the gathered disciples, "worship" and "doubt" or "hesitation." Osborne notes that "Matthew uses the word *δισταζω* which can mean to "hesitate" as well as "doubt" but does not really connote unbelief."⁸⁰ In doing so, Matthew draws attention to weakness in the disciples' faith and the reality that "the disciples are still growing in their faith and understanding and have not yet reached maturity."⁸¹ In and of themselves they are insufficient and personally lacking the faith to fully embrace the risen Christ and the mission that is to follow. Carson rightly surmises, "Jesus' resurrection did not instantly transform men of little faith and faltering understanding into spiritual giants."⁸²

The characterization of the disciples' faith in verse 18 sets the stage for Jesus' divine disclosure of his exalted and eternal position. France interjects at this point,

⁷⁹Matt 28:18 "And Jesus came and said to them, 'All *authority* in heaven and on earth has been given to me'" (emphasis mine).

⁸⁰Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2010), 1077.

⁸¹*Ibid.*

⁸²Carson, *Matthew*, 594.

The risen Jesus, vindicated over those who tried to destroy him, is now established as the universal sovereign of the “one like a son of man” in Daniel’s vision, but heaven as well. At the beginning of the gospel Satan offered Jesus sovereignty over the whole earth but his offer was refused (4:8-10); now Jesus, going the way of obedience to his Father spoken already in 11:27 of “everything entrusted to me by my Father”; now that authority is fully spelled out—indeed, Jesus himself now possesses the authority that he attributed to his Father as “Lord of heaven and earth” in 11:25. It is the universal sovereignty that is the essential basis of the commission which is to follow in vv. 19-20, and thus of the continuing life of the disciple community until the end of the age.⁸³

However, this is not a new position for Jesus. In the outworking of his earthly ministry, Jesus demonstrated divine authority over every area he encountered. Yet, his power was veiled and eclipsed at times by the will of God and Jesus’ obedience to it. But now all clouds are gone and Jesus can assert the divine authority that has been granted to him by his Father. Nolland writes, “It seems, then, that Matthew 28:18 is most likely to represent a reaffirmation of authority after the rejection of Jesus by the Jerusalem authorities which led to his death. Through resurrection God has vindicated Jesus, who is now able to freshly affirm his authority.”⁸⁴ Osborne expands on this adding, “Yet at the same time it is a new level of authority, as Jesus receives from his Father his preexistent glory and authority As seen in 16:19; 18:18 this authority ‘in heaven and on earth’ is linked to the authority to ‘bind and loose,’ given to the church, so it is intimately linked to the church’s mission in v. 19.”⁸⁵

It is plain that there is a new dimension to the authority of Jesus. Hagner observes that God is the active subject in the passive verb *ἑδόθη*, “has been given.” In

⁸³R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2007), 1113.

⁸⁴Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1265.

⁸⁵Osborne, *Matthew*, 1079.

light of this he writes,

God has given Jesus this comprehensive sovereignty over the whole of the created order. . . . 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 . . . 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,” and everlasting dominion, that all peoples, nations and languages should serve him.⁸⁶

It is not new authority, but a new situation in redemption history that the Lord Jesus speaks from. Osborne further clarifies *ἐξουσία*, “authority,” by stating it “is a more comprehensive than ‘power’ (dynamis), referring to position as well as function. The kingdom of heaven is already present in Christ and thus his assertion of authority provides the foundation for the ecclesiastical command.”⁸⁷

The covenantal focus of Israel has given way to broader, universal demands. The law has been fulfilled and redemption has come to the world through Israel on account of God's faithfulness to his covenant with Abraham and the nation of Israel. The purpose in all these actions is the cause and calling of discipleship. Christopher J. H. Wright in *The Mission of God* writes, “Finally, Matthew closes his Gospel by making quite explicit what the opening of his Gospel has implied—the universality of Jesus Christ and the worldwide extent of the demand for discipleship.”⁸⁸ It is to the cause of discipleship that Jesus gives his authority, focus, and power in the final words of

⁸⁶Donald A Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 33B (Dallas: Word, 1995), 886.

⁸⁷Osborne, *Matthew*, 1079.

⁸⁸Wright, *The Mission of God*, 244.

Matthew. The pervasive authority of Jesus is the basis of the universal mission of the church.⁸⁹ France makes careful note that this universal authority of Jesus goes beyond politics and the nation of Israel by stating, “It is the universal kingship of the Son of Man which has emerged as a distinctive feature of Matthew’s presentation of Jesus.”⁹⁰

In light of the new redemptive reality, Jesus gives the imperative command to *μαθητεύσατε*, “make disciples,” together with three syntactically subordinate participles that take on imperatival force because of the main verb.⁹¹ The first participle, “‘Go’ is the operative act, as now God’s people are no longer to stay in Jerusalem and be a kind of ‘show’n’tell’ for the nations but they are actively to go and take the message to the nations. Matthew’s emphasis on the universal mission is consummated here, with ‘all the nations’ meaning Jewish and Gentile mission.”⁹²

Furthermore, the “Go” to all nations is an expansion of the previous mission to the nation of Israel which was a limiting factor in Matthew 10:5-6. This universal vision “belongs within a vision of a fresh beginning in Galilee of a new mission that is to reiterate, but on a new level, the earlier ministry of Jesus, and in which the disciples replace Jesus himself as the main protagonists (but with Jesus with them).”⁹³ “Jesus’ universal Lordship now demands a universal mission. The restriction of the disciples’

⁸⁹Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 887.

⁹⁰France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1113.

⁹¹Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 886.

⁹²Osborne, *Matthew*, 1080.

⁹³Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1266.

mission to Israel alone in 10:5-6 can now be lifted, for the kingdom of the Son of man as described in Daniel 7:14 requires disciples of all nations.”⁹⁴

The emphasis of the controlling imperative, “to make disciples,” must be understood in its proper context to gain the depth of the command of Jesus. Carson unpacks this call in quoting Broadus, “To disciple a person to Christ is to bring him into the relation of pupil to teacher, ‘taking his yoke’ of authoritative instruction (11:29), accepting what he says as true because he says it, and submitting to his requirements as right because he makes them.”⁹⁵ Carson continues,

Disciples are those who hear, understand, and obey Jesus’ teaching (12:46-50). The injunction is given at least to the Eleven, but to the Eleven in their own role as disciples (v.16). Therefore they are paradigms for all disciples. Plausibly the command is given to a larger gathering of disciples. Either way it is binding on all Jesus’ disciples to make others what they themselves are – disciples of Jesus Christ.⁹⁶

Osborne draws on Jesus’ discipleship method and states,

Jesus mandates that all mission activity emulate his pattern of discipling followers as exemplified in this gospel. They must be brought to understanding and to that deep ethical commitment patterned in the Sermon on the Mount and Community Discourse; then they will become ‘trained as disciples in the kingdom’ (13:52).⁹⁷

Discipleship demands submission to the authority of the teacher and then discipline applied to one’s life to incorporate the teaching and instruction into unhindered obedience.

⁹⁴France, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 413.

⁹⁵John Broadus, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Valley Forge, PA: American Baptist Publication Society, 1886), quoted in Carson, *Matthew*, 595-96.

⁹⁶*Ibid.*, 596.

⁹⁷Osborne, *Matthew*, 1080.

These thoughts are reflected in the two remaining circumstantial participles, “baptizing” and “teaching.” Carson writes, “The force of this command is to make Jesus’ disciples responsible for making disciples of others, a task characterized by baptism and instruction.”⁹⁸ Disciples are to be baptized “into” the name of the “Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” It is a decisive event that signifies adherence to the life of discipleship and entrance “into” relationship with the triune God. France writes of baptism, “It is a commitment to (in the name is literally ‘into the name’, implying entrance into an allegiance) the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (all three of whom, interestingly, were involved in the event of Jesus’ own baptism, 3:16-17). . . .The experience of God in these three Persons is the essential basis of discipleship.”⁹⁹ Carson further comments on the positional implications of baptism by stating, “the preposition “into” strongly suggests a coming-into-relationship-with or a coming-under-the-Lordship-of It is a sign both of entrance into Messiah’s covenant community and of pledged submission to his Lordship.”¹⁰⁰

Finally, making disciples also entails instruction in the authoritative teaching and commands of Jesus. Wright highlights the ethical implications of the teaching and the life of discipleship as a whole in saying,

He commissions his own disciples to go out and replicate themselves by creating communities of obedience among the nations. They are to teach, and the nations are to learn, what it means to “observe all that I have commanded you,” a piece of pure

⁹⁸Carson, *Matthew*, 597.

⁹⁹France, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 414.

¹⁰⁰Carson, *Matthew*, 597.

Deuteronomy. This mission is replicated discipleship, learned through ethical obedience and passed on through teaching.¹⁰¹

One must be diligent to teach so that the disciple can “observe all that I have commanded you.” Any claim to discipleship must be demonstrated in obedience. France summarizes the foundation of this orientation in saying, “The basis of living as the people of God will henceforth be the new “commandments” given by Jesus.”¹⁰²

The delegation of teaching clearly establishes the ongoing requirement of expositional instruction in the five discourses that Matthew carefully preserves. Osborne underscores the gravity of the teaching requirement in noting, “In our teaching ministry, we partake of Jesus’ authority “in heaven and on earth” (28:18). In other words, we disseminate the Lordship of Christ in this world as we proclaim his truths.”¹⁰³ In the pursuit of fulfilling our teaching mandate, Blomberg writes, “Jesus’ words further demonstrate that Christian ethics and morality should first of all focus on Jesus’ teaching, the testimony of the Gospels and the commands Jesus issued (of which more are found in Matthew than in Mark, Luke, or John) must comprise the central core of Christian faith and proclamation.”¹⁰⁴ Christ’s disciples have a responsibility to proclaim him and have the right to expect and demand conformity through observance of his commands from any who would claim to follow him. Morris exhorts the church in its discipleship mission:

¹⁰¹Wright, *Mission of God*, 391.

¹⁰²France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1118.

¹⁰³Osborne, *Matthew*, 1082.

¹⁰⁴Blomberg, *Matthew*, 432.

The church's teaching function is thus of great importance. We teach because Jesus commanded us to teach, and there is not a way of diminishing the importance of an activity that owes its origin to the command of our Lord himself. But Jesus is not speaking about education for education's sake. He speaks of the taught as "observing" what Jesus has commanded. In other words, Jesus is concerned with a way of life. . . . So there is to be instruction and there is to be purity of life. We should not miss the significance of all the things. Jesus is not suggesting that his followers should make a selection from his teachings as it pleases them and neglect the rest. Since the teaching of Jesus is a unified whole, disciples are to observe all that this means.¹⁰⁵

The revelation of Jesus as the Messiah at this late stage in salvation history brings the fulfillment of everything to which the OT Scriptures pointed and constitutes their valid continuity; but this means that the focus is necessarily on Jesus.¹⁰⁶ This is the only message of the church or any disciple.

Jesus left his disciples with a promise and assurance of his presence with them. Matthew's last recorded words of Jesus' earthly ministry are, "And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." Osborne observes,

The Great Commission is thus framed by the omnipotence (v.18) and omnipresence (v.20b) of Christ. The theme partakes of the Shekinah glory of the OT and the divine comfort of Yahweh's presence among men (not just divine presence but divine assistance). So God's protection of his people throughout the ages is promised to the church."¹⁰⁷

As the book of Matthew closes, Jesus promises ongoing ministry in the lives of his disciples. Matthew disclosed the reality of Jesus as "Immanuel, God with us," in Matthew 1:23 and here in 28:20 it is the promise of his ongoing presence, "I am with you always." This incredible promise of Jesus was probably received with a lack of

¹⁰⁵Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 749.

¹⁰⁶Carson, *Matthew*, 599.

¹⁰⁷Osborne, *Matthew*, 1082.

understanding and clarity that accompanied Jesus' other great predictions concerning his death and resurrection. As before, the events of the near-future would validate its reality. This reality would be their empowerment for their discipleship mission. France comments,

The promise of God's presence often accompanied his call to service in the Old Testament; it is not so much a cozy reassurance as a necessary equipment for mission. That the risen Lord can now make such a promise as God made to his people in the past brings the Gospel's portrait of Jesus ('God with us', 1:23) to a stupendous climax.¹⁰⁸

He concludes by saying, "Jesus' physical presence with his disciples was limited to the period of his earthly life span, but the spiritual presence of the risen Jesus has no such limitation: it is as an eternal, divine being that Jesus will be among his obedient people, "God with us."¹⁰⁹

Conclusion

The teaching of Matthew lays out the pattern of discipleship and the ongoing requirements that it demands. The teaching here is that discipleship demands absolute surrender to Jesus but it also entails great authority, indeed, sharing in the authority of Jesus.¹¹⁰ There is no greater call and certainly no greater pursuit than that of walking in the steps of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, Immanuel—God with us. The Gospel of Matthew delivers a clarion call for passionate biblical discipleship. Matthew establishes the kingship of Christ and clearly details the path required of all disciples. From the call

¹⁰⁸France, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 416.

¹⁰⁹France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1119.

¹¹⁰Osborne, *Matthew*, 1104.

to the commission, Christ's disciples must reflect his character and steadfast confidence which are built securely on the criterion of faith—demonstrated in obedience.

CHAPTER 3

MATTHEW'S BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL EXAMINATION OF THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP

Matthew unfolds his gospel in such a way as to underscore the importance of discipleship in the lives of those who follow Christ. What starts with a compelling call in Matthew 4, culminates in the Great Commission in Matthew 28. Through the events captured by Matthew, Jesus clearly holds forth the high demands of discipleship and compels his disciples to understand the full cost of their commitment to him. Through the details of interactions with faith-filled individuals, pointed instruction, miraculous interventions, challenging situations, fierce persecution, and personal practice, Matthew records the life of a disciple with great clarity and personal insight. The cost of following Christ demands complete and total surrender.

The understanding and acceptance of these costs and the ability to convey them is assumed in the Great Commission itself. Those “going” in Matthew 28:19 will have to actively embrace the costs of discipleship while seeking to enlist others, which the Lord has called, to embrace these rigorous demands as well. Discipleship is not for the weak and will never be realized by a half-hearted commitment. It is unashamedly costly and requires individuals to live beyond themselves while offering up their very lives in demonstrated devotion and dedication to the One who has called them.

Those going forth to fulfill the Great Commission would have needed a body

of material to teach and instruct the disciples in the path of commitment and obedience.

Donald Guthrie writes concerning the production of the gospels,

The need for a historical record for catechetical purposes is at once obvious. Without minimizing the custom of oral instruction so highly esteemed among the Jews, it is questionable whether this procedure would have made so strong an appeal to Gentile converts. The Gentile mission, in fact, would have been greatly assisted by written documents for catechesis, and although the need may not have been at once recognized it must have dawned upon the missionary church at an early stage.¹

He goes on to state,

Perhaps more attention should be given, however, to the catechetical purpose of this gospel [Matthew]. That there was a need for suitable material for catechetical instruction has already been mentioned. The methods used in such instruction of new converts are, however, mainly a matter of conjecture. At least it may be said that Matthew's gospel would well suit such a purpose, although his cannot establish that such a purpose is present.²

The words of Matthew's gospel have been instructing disciples for almost two thousand years. In this book, the cost of answering the call to discipleship is conveyed and the commitment required is very clear. These words have been a source of instruction and confidence to all who have obediently followed Christ's call and paid the price that biblical discipleship demands.

Matthew 5:38-42

Up to this point in Matthew's gospel a complete surrender to the kingdom of God has been demonstrated in the lives of Peter, Andrew, James, and John. They left everything to pursue the call of their master. This surrender is implicit in the command,

¹Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1990), 23.

²Ibid., 37.

“follow me.” As a result, disciples left their earthly pursuits and practices to ascertain the promises of the kingdom of heaven. As Jesus unfolds the character and attitudes of the kingdom-focused disciple, the calling and cost become very personal and practical. These matters of the heart and personal integrity demand living outside the realm of selfish expediency and must be firmly rooted in righteousness—God’s righteousness.

Jesus clearly establishes this standard in saying, “For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 5:20). What follows in the Sermon on the Mount is an explanation and exposition of what this entails for each disciple. Jesus takes what has been said in the Law and implemented into the religious practices of Israel and establishes a higher understanding of obedience that God’s righteousness demands. Jesus establishes a “narrow way” for the disciple that will demonstrate the righteousness required. These directives will guide each disciple on the narrow path of obedience which will lead them to implement the unworldly ethics of the kingdom of heaven.

There are many costly avenues in the Sermon on the Mount to investigate. These include anger, lust, marital fidelity, and integrity in your speech. Each of these, when understood by the disciple, will demand fervent action to align oneself with God’s righteousness. One specific demand of Jesus, which strikes at the core of an individual, is his instruction on retaliation in Matthew 5:38-42. Here Jesus instructs his disciples of the righteous path through conflicts concerning personal rights and possessions. This passage exemplifies limitations imposed on disciples, because of their commitment to Christ, clearly encouraging an unnatural and costly course of action.

Jesus starts this passage with, “you have heard it was said,” in verse 38 and then heightens it with, “But I say to you,” in verse 39. The result is the setting aside of the universally accepted law of *lex talionis*, “the law of retribution”, that was established in the Law (Exod 21.24; Lev 24.20; Deut 19.21), and even stipulated earlier in the ancient Code of Hammurabi. According to the law, justice was to be administered equitably in a way which was commensurate with the nature of the offense. Osborne writes,

In its OT context it is not so much encouraging retaliation as it is trying to control excesses by saying that the payment should exactly fit the crime and especially by making the punishment be part of the law court system rather than by individual vigilante actions. In other words, it gave the right to take a person to court rather than to seek revenge.³

The intention of this law was restrained justice. This law maintained it through the court of law for the protection of all parties involved. Nolland underscores this in writing, “The OT texts address the community and its leadership structures and not the victim or the victim’s family as such.”⁴ This law neither demanded action nor empowered individuals. It served as a measure for appropriate justice in the face of an egregious wrong.

Jesus takes this and makes the demand on the kingdom-minded disciple very personal and costly. In his instruction, Jesus calls his disciples to view the situation before them as an opportunity to display kingdom righteousness. In doing so, the responses of the disciple are conditioned by kingdom realities not earthly estimations. Nolland writes, “The behavior of the other is to be challenged by the moral strength of one who can provocatively signal a preference for suffering wrong over feeding the spiral

³Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 208.

⁴John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 256.

of violence.”⁵

At the heart of Jesus’ teaching is the clear directive to absorb evil and unrighteousness in order to diffuse it. This understanding establishes a situation where justice is set aside for the sake of grace and mercy. This allows them to triumph over retribution and evil. These divine qualities of Christ, so prominently featured in his passion events, are delivered to the disciples to condition their steps, guide their responses, and bring about righteousness in a situation that was born out of offense and evil. Morris clearly communicates the disciple’s responsibility in saying, “the principles that we are to refrain from asserting our rights and that we should put the needs of others before our own run all of life and mark the difference between the servant of God and the worldling.”⁶

There is a higher standard for the disciple, a kingdom-focused standard that requires a surrender of one’s rights in favor of the opportunity to insert kingdom realities into an evil situation. France writes, “A willingness to forgo one’s personal rights, and to allow oneself to be insulted and imposed upon, is not incompatible with a firm stand for matters of principle and for the rights of others.”⁷ He continues, “Indeed the principle of just retribution is not so much abrogated here as bypassed, in favor of an attitude which refuses to insist on one’s rights, however legitimate.”⁸ In this we understand the higher

⁵Ibid., 255.

⁶Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 126.

⁷R. T. France, *The Gospel According to Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 126.

⁸Ibid.

calling to righteousness entails the surrender of oneself for the sake of relationships which leads to a powerful demonstration of overcoming evil with good.

Jesus moves on from this general statement of resisting an evil person in verse 39 to give some challenging teaching on how this may be applied in the circumstances of life. It is probably best to understand these circumstances detailed in verses 39-42 as hyperbole, at least on some level, where the examples challenge the disciples to an extreme position. Keener writes, “But hyperbole was meant to provoke hearers to consider the radical nature of what they were being told: Jesus is quite literally calling them to value relationships supremely and regard possessions as nothing. (The point is absolute unselfishness, motivated by love; cf. 5:43-44).”⁹

Whether you consider the physical aggression and insult of the slap, the demand for physical possessions, the conscription into service, or the request of the borrower, the response of a disciple to these and every circumstance of life, must be determined by the standard of kingdom righteousness. These instructions are not religious platitudes, they are practical and transforming truths clothed in the harsh realities of everyday situations.

The path of discipleship is pervasive and demands a continual surrender of personal rights and legal recompense in order to establish the pursuit of the kingdom of heaven, through righteousness, as the highest reality and true goal of earthly life. Boice highlights the discipleship position well in saying, “These verses teach that a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ has no right to retaliation, no right to things, no right to his own

⁹Craig S. Keener, “Nonresistance,” in *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993; Logos Bible Software).

time, and no right to his money. In other words, he holds all his possessions in trust from the Lord, and he is obliged to use them as Jesus did, to help others.”¹⁰ Blomberg adds,

Each of these commands requires Jesus’ followers to act more generously than what the letter of the law demanded. “Going the extra mile” has rightly become a proverbial expression and captures the essence of all of Jesus’ illustrations. Not only must disciples reject all behavior motivated only by a desire for retaliation, but they also must positively work for the good of those with whom they would otherwise be at odds.¹¹

Discipleship is demanding! These representative situations show how following Christ must transform your decision making process and produce these radical responses.

Time has been taken to lay out Jesus’ expectations, desired responses, and costly demands of disciples over the explanation of these individual situations put forward. These situations converge on the central truth of living out our kingdom calling in righteousness at the expense of our rights and possessions. The claim of discipleship is validated only when one manifests kingdom values, principles, and righteousness in life’s circumstances. Jesus calls us to follow him and this “following” must bring about a wholesale transformation of values and priorities. Osborne summarizes,

Instead of demanding our rights and seeking justice over every wrong, perceived or otherwise, kingdom citizens expect little from this world and place their trust wholly in God. We defer to others and seek at all times to give rather than take. This is a radical departure from Jewish teaching and demands the type of new covenant outlook that is at the heart of Jesus’ teaching.¹²

Disciples are driven by righteousness and fervently pursue living out their kingdom convictions. As a result, there is a personal price to be continually paid. It is costly,

¹⁰James Montgomery Boice, *The Sermon on the Mount: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002), 134.

¹¹Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary, vol. 22 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 113.

¹²Osborne, *Matthew*, 209.

impactful, and truly transformational as you bring the realities of the kingdom of heaven to your relationship and circumstances of life.

Matthew 8:18-22

Following the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7, Matthew immediately brings Jesus' authority into clear view by detailing his miraculous ministry in the lives of the sick and infirmed. As Jesus' ministry unfolds he gathers a crowd of followers and these begin to align themselves with him and some desire to follow him as disciples. Mathew includes Jesus' interaction with two such individuals to underscore important realities of a properly understood commitment to discipleship. These two individuals move through Matthew's narrative with no stated resolution to Jesus' comments, leaving the focus on Jesus' instruction concerning discipleship not the individuals themselves. In this passage Jesus teaches two important truths regarding the cost of discipleship.

First, Jesus addresses a self-proclaimed follower who promised, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." This self-derived desire to follow Jesus was undoubtedly born out of the miracles that Jesus performed. Jesus responds to this pursuant disciple in veiled language, acknowledging his divine orientation through the 'Son of Man' designation, from which he draws a costly earthly implication—no place of rest and comfort. Discipleship with Jesus is strictly for those who are pursuing the kingdom of God. This changes everything. It is costly and results in forsaking earthly comforts. There is no home on earth for the Son of Man or his disciple. They truly live with an insatiable kingdom desire that has no earthly abode.

In Jesus' response to this scribe, Jesus states earthly realities, "Foxes have

holes, and birds of the air have nests,” and then moves to highlight the implications of his divine initiative and ministry which by implication must become the pursuit of every true disciple as well. A disciple must surrender attachments to the comforts and common establishments of this earth. To be like his master, the disciple must pursue the kingdom of God with its goals and realities which are dramatically different than earth-bound ones.

A disciple must embrace kingdom thinking and the resulting deprivation of earthly comforts. Lenski writes, “What Jesus impresses upon this scribe is the fact that his whole calling and work are engaged in not for mere earthly interests but for the kingdom and for that alone.”¹³ He continues on stating, “Jesus refers to his homelessness merely as an illustration of the path his followers must walk, choosing the spiritual instead of the carnal, the life with eternal purposes instead of the temporal, heavenly treasures instead of earthly.”¹⁴ Blomberg furthers the conversation by stating, “At a deeper level Jesus’ disciples must recognize that no location on earth affords a true home. Our citizenship is in heaven (Phil 3:20), and life on earth is lived as ‘strangers [sojourners, exiles] in the world’ (1 Pet 1:1).”¹⁵

There is a cost to be realized well beyond physical comforts and structures. As the ministry of Jesus progresses, it becomes clear, and would have been clear to Matthew at the time of his writing, that those following Jesus will face detachment from the prevailing social order of society that is rooted in earthbound understandings. Nolland brings this point out by acknowledging, “Deprivation plays its part in what Jesus is

¹³R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel* (Columbus, OH: The Wartburg Press, 1943), 339.

¹⁴Lenski, *Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel*, 339-40.

¹⁵Blomberg, *Matthew*, 146.

speaking of, but the main focus is on being made unwelcome by others. The scribe is offering to join what is to become an outcast group.¹⁶ Jesus is warning this well-intended disciple that he will have no rest as his orientation transitions to a kingdom perspective.

This leads one to face the stark realities of the cost of discipleship. Lenski in his harsh criticism of the scribe compares him to “the seed on stony ground which grew quickly but lacked root to withstand the hot sun.”¹⁷ He continues in his unflattering assessment, “He is superficial and does not count the cost. He sees the soldiers on parade, the fine uniforms and the glittering arms, and is eager to join, forgetting the exhausting marches, the bloody battles, the graves, perhaps unmarked. It is less cruel to disillusion such a man than to let him rush in and go down to disappointment.”¹⁸

Jesus instructs the scribe through his response that the course of action to which he is offering himself is very costly. The discipleship calling results in a precarious position that will only be sustained with genuine kingdom convictions, not personal desire, because of the harsh implications which will be experienced here on earth.

The second teaching of Jesus concerning the cost of discipleship in this passage follows the statement of ‘another of the disciples’ who said, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.” Jesus responds, “Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead.” This tradition-shattering response from Jesus strikes to the very core of familial identity, responsibility, and expectation. France comments, “Jesus’ refusal to allow so

¹⁶Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 367.

¹⁷Lenski, *Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel*, 338.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 338-39.

essential a filial duty would then be profoundly shocking.”¹⁹

Jesus brings a clear challenge to this “disciple’s” hesitation or excuse. Osborne points out the fact that, “Jesus’ use of the present tense imperative ‘follow’ (*ἀκολουθεῖ*) demands lifelong commitment.”²⁰ Disciples of Jesus must have a dedication that supersedes all earthly attachments, obligations, or relationships. France remarks, “The cultural ‘insensitivity’ of Jesus’ demand underlines the radical newness and overriding importance of the message of the kingdom of heaven; even the most basic of family ties must not be allowed to stand in its way.”²¹

In a culture where familial relationships were stipulated and undergirded by religious traditions, Jesus’ demand was clearly understood to establish a new standard of commitment that superseded the esteemed cultural ties. Carson comments, “even closest family ties must not be set above allegiances to Jesus and the proclamation of the kingdom. . . . Commitment to Jesus must be without reservation.”²² In Jesus’ estimation there is a greater calling, one that transcends earthly obligations and rituals. In Nolland’s mind, “The force of the words is: ‘Let other arrangements be made; you have more pressing duties.’”²³ These duties deal “with life, not with death” and are primarily concerned with the issues pertaining to the unfolding kingdom and the present working of

¹⁹R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 329.

²⁰Osborne, *Matthew*, 306.

²¹France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 330.

²²D. A. Carson, *Matthew*. in vol. 8 of *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 209.

²³Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 367.

the King.²⁴

The focus of these two conversations is squarely centered on the requirement of a disciple's unwavering, unhindered commitment. France concludes, "The kingdom of heaven apparently involves a degree of fanaticism which is willing to disrupt the normal rhythms of social life."²⁵ Furthermore, Osborne rightly surmises, "To follow Jesus is costly, demanding the surrender of other allegiances and the absolute priority of Jesus in our lives. The kingdom has now come, and to become citizens of that kingdom means to renounce other citizenships, to become 'foreigners and strangers.'"²⁶ Hagner adds,

Disciples are therefore in a sense always learners who are discovering more about discipleship as they attempt to live in obedience to Jesus. But the key point is that the call is radical; so too must the responding commitment be radical. There is a fundamental principle here about the radical character, urgency, and uncompromising nature of discipleship that is to be heard with every invitation to, or volunteering of, discipleship to Jesus and the cause of the kingdom.²⁷

Jesus used these pointed responses to instruct and equip his true kingdom disciples with some non-negotiable truths and challenges.

This encounter on the shore of Galilee is a true line in the sand for those who are serious about following Jesus. The subjects addressed strike at the very core of earthbound structures and obligations—both cultural and religious. Understanding the gravity of these conversations, Blomberg concludes, "Taken together, Jesus' responses to these two men could hardly reflect a sharper break from Judaism or a more stringent call

²⁴France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 330.

²⁵Ibid., 331.

²⁶Osborne, *Matthew*, 302.

²⁷Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 33A (Dallas: Word, 1993), 218.

to count the cost of discipleship.”²⁸ The call of discipleship is to pursue the king and his kingdom. It demands the willing deprivation of earthly pursuits, comforts, and obligations while willingly embracing the radical commitment and personal cost involved in living for the kingdom of God.

Matthew 10:16-23

What Jesus had promised and esteemed in the final Beatitude in Matthew 5 is now applied to the individual disciples in Matthew 10. The lessons from communal discipleship have culminated now in a launch into individual ministry. The disciples are sent forth to testify and proclaim that “the kingdom of heaven is at hand”(Matt 10:7). With kingdom rewards promised to them and the kingdom message entrusted to them, Jesus unashamedly commissions his disciples into a perilous and adversarial arena which will demand unflinching commitment and a heavy personal cost.

In his own words, Jesus sends forth his disciples “as sheep in the midst of wolves” exhorting them to demonstrate wisdom in their dangerous predicament. Jesus follows this charge with the frank warning, “Beware of men.” From the beginning it is clear that this mission will exact a high personal cost from anyone who would give themselves to it. It is this cost, the cost of discipleship listed here in Matthew 10, which will be examined in the following paragraphs.

It is clearly established in Jesus’ words that hardship and peril will be constantly before them. They will go out as defenseless sheep having surrendered their earthly aspirations to Jesus, having taken up his kingdom initiative. Their natural

²⁸Blomberg, *Matthew*, 148.

inclination to comfort and personal safety have been laid aside in obedience to the command of their “shepherd.” Continual danger will surround them and the malicious schemes of their enemies will exploit the disciples’ perceived weaknesses before religious and civil authorities.

Jesus’ words find their fulfillment well beyond the sending of the Twelve in Matthew 10:5-15 and thus demands a much broader understanding than those initially sent out. France writes, “Its application is apparently wider than that, as the rejection of the Twelve at this stage in Galilee is unlikely to have been sufficiently violent to justify the vivid simile of sheep among wolves. It acts rather as a pointer to the eventually more serious vulnerability of disciples confronting a hostile world.”²⁹ Surely these realities were clearly understood by the time of Matthew’s writing as vicious persecution surfaced immediately following Pentecost and, as promised, continue to this day.

In this midst of these harsh realities, the disciples are not given to self-defense and struggle but rather focus on their appointed tasks, representing Jesus, and testifying to his gospel. The words of Jesus in verse 17 demonstrate the intense nature of their personal hardship. Jesus promises that his disciples will be delivered, flogged, and dragged before authorities. However, these hardships orchestrate a beautiful opportunity to testify before the highest authorities the message of Jesus. The personal price is not without reward and advantage. Lenski writes, “This will be a grand testimony, indeed, greater even than ordinary preaching. For it will compel these high authorities to investigate judicially the whole cause of the gospel, noting all that it contains and all that

²⁹France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 390.

it does for men.³⁰ Thus France rightly concludes, “Persecution and official opposition will thus contribute to the spreading of the gospel rather than stifling it.”³¹

Disciples must always keep the objective to bear witness before them. In this, there is an inherent deficiency in the disciple to fulfill the divine commission. Disciples are weak and ill-equipped. However, their weakness is overcome by the promise of the “Spirit of your Father” who will equip them for testimony in that hour. France notes that this “is the only passage which gives practical substance to the promise of 3:11 that Jesus would baptize his people with the Holy Spirit, in that only here is a particular gift or ability said to come to disciples through the Spirit ‘in You.’”³² And this gift is given for the enablement of testimony and proclamation of the gospel.

“At that hour” in verse 19 necessitates a continual dependence and reliance upon the Spirit. It will not be obtained by study or secured beforehand. Nolland writes, “‘in that hour’ underlines the correspondence between the needs of the moment with all their specificity and the concrete provision made by God.”³³ The faithfulness of God will outfit the disciple with complete sufficiency as they testify the gospel message. So pervasive is the Spirit’s role, Matthew goes to the point of establishing the Spirit’s very conveyance of the defense through the disciple. Concerning this situation, Nolland writes, “This would be yet another respect in which the disciples will extend the scope of their

³⁰Lenski, *Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel*, 400.

³¹France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 392.

³²*Ibid.*, 393.

³³Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 425.

master's ministry."³⁴ The disciple, a weak and deficient vessel, becomes the instrument of God's declaratory work.

Persecution will extend to unimaginable lengths. The cost of discipleship will sever the sacred ties of family relationships. Turner comments, "The kingdom message will be excruciatingly divisive, severing the most cherished human relationships."³⁵ This leaves the disciple truly no place to hide. The authorities will abuse them and their families will seek their lives. Jesus' words are sharp and succinct, "you will be hated by all for my name's sake." Matthew utilizes hyperbole to express the extent of the hatred. In identifying "all men," he is clearly establishing, as Carson puts it, "all men irrespective of race, color, or creed."³⁶

Matthew will move in the subsequent verses of Matthew 10 to draw the harsh and terminal conclusion which is alluded to in verses 21 and 22. With clear specification Jesus concludes in Matthew 10:39-39, "whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." France comments,

[This paradox was] a keynote of Jesus' call to discipleship. . . . True life, real fulfillment, is found neither by the line of least resistance nor by aggressive self-assertion. But this is not a general philosophical maxim; it is the loss of life (not necessarily literally, though it *may* be) *for my sake* which achieves the goal. The disciple puts Jesus before his own natural inclinations and interests as well as before those of his family. As throughout this passage, Jesus' demand centres on loyalty to himself, in full awareness of the conflict this may entail.³⁷

³⁴Ibid., 425.

³⁵David L. Turner, *Matthew*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 276.

³⁶Carson, *Matthew*, 250.

³⁷France, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 189-90.

France concludes, “Jesus’ thought here extends beyond the immediate Galilean situation. . . . to the passionate and all-consuming opposition which loyalty to his cause has evoked through the ages since.”³⁸

Jesus warns his disciples of this painful reality to highlight his final exhortation in this section, “to endure to the end.” Finish the commission by boldly testifying the gospel with persistent endurance. The cost must never diminish the disciple’s resolve to obedience and a clearly articulated testimony. In fact, Jesus underscores the fact that persistence is required to secure the kingdom blessings. He makes this very clear in the following verses. Allen summarizes the entire passage in saying, “The disciples would be dragged before courts of justice, v.17; they would be killed by their relatives, v.21. But they were not to fear physical death, v.28. If they shrank back and recanted their faith in Christ, He would deny them before God, v.33. They must be prepared to go to a shameful death, following His example, v.38.”³⁹

An unrelenting pursuit of the kingdom will move the undaunted disciple from one location to another, spreading the gospel while generating hatred and persecution. France moves to clarify Jesus’ understanding of ‘the end’ by stating, “The ‘end’ is defined more by the future ‘salvation’ which terminates the period of ‘remaining faithful’ than by a specific historical or eschatological reference. . . . Jesus is talking not about the preservation of physical life, but the ultimate well-being which is compatible with the

³⁸Ibid., 183.

³⁹Willoughby C. Allen, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, International Critical Commentary, 3rd ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1985), 111.

loss of physical life.”⁴⁰ Blomberg further comments that “our faith may become visible only when our lives are on the line.”⁴¹

This ongoing discipleship endeavor will continue until the “Son of Man” comes. There exist many interpretations for Jesus’ words surrounding his arrival. A clear understanding is required because it establishes the duration of the disciple’s commission. In light of this reality it would seem best to understand the coming of “the Son of Man” in the context of Daniel’s prophecy in 7:13-14 which details the conveyance of dominion, glory, and a kingdom. This would establish the resurrection and the entire completed mission of redemption as the basis for the presentation of the “Son of Man”.⁴²

With this perspective, the commission and situation of Matthew 10:16-23 continues to characterize disciples with the scope of the commission further expanded by the Great Commission of Matthew 28. In fact, it is the Great Commission that truly found the reality of Jesus’ teaching and exhortation in these verses. These words of warning and encouragement are still strengthening the resolve of Jesus’ disciples. Furthermore, they are instructing new disciples in the cost and difficult implications of being a committed follower of Jesus Christ.

Matthew 16:24-28

Jesus continues to lay out the cost of discipleship with the self-sacrificing exhortation recorded in Matthew 16:24-28. Jesus has just finished predicting his own

⁴⁰France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 394-95.

⁴¹Blomberg, *Matthew*, 175.

⁴²See R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 395-98, for his discussion regarding interpreting Matt 10:23 in light of Dan 7:13-14 and Matt 28:18-19.

suffering at the hands of the elders, chief priests, and scribes which will culminate in his death. This prediction beginning in Matthew 16:21 begins a new focus for Jesus with his disciples. France writes, “Now both the style and the content of Jesus’ teaching enter a new phase. It is focused on the private instruction of his disciples, and its content is the true nature of his Messianic mission as one of suffering and rejection, in which they are to follow him.”⁴³

Peter brazenly confronts Jesus’ words with disdain and is rebuked. In his response, Jesus charges Peter with “not having a mind set on the things of God, but on the things of man.” (Matt 16:23). The ensuing teaching must be considered in light of this accusation along with Peter’s natural human response.

The true essence of the cost of discipleship is summed up in verses 24 and 25. It demands radical self-denial to the point of total surrender of one’s physical life. Matthew’s use of *ἀπαρνέομαι*, “to deny strongly,” carries with it the implication of rejection—‘to deny, to reject.’⁴⁴ Therefore the disciple must surrender all self-attachments to the extent of a complete rejection or renunciation of all claims to self-determination and existence. France brings out the extreme call of denying one’s self by underscoring the literal application of Jesus’ words by stating,

In such a context *deny himself* must not be trivialized into a call for a mild asceticism; it means to renounce his right to life. This sort of discipleship is not the result of an easy compliance, but of a deliberate and irrevocable dedication These verses then call for a true sense of values, and remind the disciple that he is

⁴³France, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 258.

⁴⁴Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, vol. 1, electronic ed. of the 2nd ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996; Logos Bible Software), 452.

faced with a fundamental choice of where true allegiance is to lie, with God or the world.⁴⁵

The cross is a visible picture of submission that includes detrimental consequences for all who bear up under it. Nolland writes, “The call is so to behave that the anticipated outcome may naturally be the loss of one’s life. . . . The call is to join Jesus as he behaves in ways which involve setting aside the claims of the inner drive to self-preservation and care for one’s own interest for the sake of a greater good.”⁴⁶

One needs to understand that the exhortation of verse 24 establishes the main emphasis of this passage. The subsequent three verses are each constructed with an explanatory *γάρ* which collectively serve to support the main idea conveyed in verse 24.⁴⁷ This instruction leads the disciple to fulfill Jesus’ initial command to “Follow me.” Therefore, the denial and the taking up the cross that he puts before them was not a suggestion but rather a determined course of action because of their prior commitment to follow him.

The cost of such a commitment is only now taking on its full expression as the hostilities toward Jesus multiply. In the end, it is the perfect example of Jesus alone that “makes it possible to fulfill the command ‘continue to follow me’ (*ἀκολουθείτω μοι*, this present tense after a series of aorists places the third command in the foreground and stresses a life of continuous discipleship).”⁴⁸ The call of Jesus is to persevere in following with full knowledge that it can demand a high cost. Carson rightly adds that, “death to

⁴⁵France, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 260-61.

⁴⁶Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 691.

⁴⁷Turner, *Matthew*, 412.

⁴⁸Osborne, *Matthew*, 637.

self is not so much a prerequisite of discipleship to Jesus as a continuing characteristic of it.”⁴⁹ Some disciples will walk the path of martyrdom. However, every disciple must experience the pain of denying himself, taking up the cross, and following him.

Jesus argues for this call to “come after him” with three compelling reasons. They all surround securing an enduring benefit or reward from life. Together they answer, “How does one invest this life wisely?” Jesus supplies three reasons. First, if you lose your life “for my sake” you will find it. Second, Jesus alludes to the insufficiency of all possible gains in helping the dreadful situation of your soul. Third, Jesus reminds the disciples that there is a final accounting for what is done here. Blomberg comments, “The logic of Jesus’ command depends wholly on the existence of life beyond the grave, which will make the joys and sorrows of this life pale into insignificance in comparison.”⁵⁰ Playing it safe is not the answer to life.

Jesus points out that radical obedience in following him will secure that which is vulnerable to loss, the very life and soul of an individual. Turner writes, “Self-preservation in the present life leads to ultimate self-destruction, and self-denial leads to ultimate self-fulfillment. Those who think they may avoid the cross and save their lives will in the end lose their lives, but those who accept the cross will find their lives after all.”⁵¹ France, in speaking of the loss of a person’s soul, notes that the word “forfeit” is “a term which often implies a judicial punishment or fine; the term is perhaps intended to make the reader think of the judgment of God which determines the person’s ultimate

⁴⁹Carson, *Matthew*, 379.

⁵⁰Blomberg, *Matthew*, 260.

⁵¹Turner, *Matthew*, 412.

destiny.”⁵² In the end the one who pursues himself and this world will be impoverished when there is a spiritual accounting for his soul. The disciple needs to let the reality of divine accountability impact one’s desires, decisions, and goals.

In Jesus’ third compelling reason for acceptance of the demands of verse 24, he brings the kingdom and the authority of the Son of Man into full view. The reality of the kingdom and the future rendering of judgment must impact the decisions and choices of the disciple. France understands the gravity of these words and writes concerning Jesus, “His coming will be in the glory of his Father, in the sense that he shares that glory and authority. It is in the light of this ultimate authority that the disciple’s allegiance must be decided.”⁵³ The question of discipleship is truly a question that determines eternity. Lenski adds, “The final, public judgment shall be regarded as a just one by the entire universe; hence the Judge will pronounce sentence according to the works, namely those mentioned in v. 24, whether they are present in a man and characterize him or not.”⁵⁴

With the assurance of the kingdom before them, Jesus heightens his invitational exhortation of verse 24 by stating that some of the disciples, presently there with him, will behold the Son of Man coming in his kingdom. Almost all the discussion of verse 28 surrounds the timing of the events foretold, trying to explain the meaning of “will not taste death” as well as the meaning of “Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”⁵⁵

⁵²France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 639.

⁵³France, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 261.

⁵⁴Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel*, 648.

⁵⁵For a detailed summary of the various interpretations of understanding of the exegetical issues of Matt 16:28, see Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 485-87.

In these varying interpretations one must not lose sight of the real promise for the disciples gathered in his presence. These words affirm the reality of the coming kingdom in *their* human experience. Jesus promises that of those standing there some will see the inauguration of the Son of Man coming in his kingdom. This is a promise of beholding the victory. Furthermore, it will not take long for the kingdom realities to materialize. It is imminent. This reality puts urgency to the invitation and offers a hope-filled perspective to the disciples. For in this declaration, there is the promise that their lives will witness these realities.

Jesus is not leading a band of disciples to a mass suicide. On the authority of his word, some of his followers will be able to witness and experience the unfolding kingdom. In the moment of hearing, these words were undoubtedly met with bewilderment and confusion. However, upon reflection, following the events predicted in verses 21-23, these words would have instilled perseverance and enthusiasm into the lives of Jesus' committed followers. The unveiling of the kingdom through the victory of the Son of Man will strengthen their wavering hearts and give them courage to live the hard but productive life of a disciple.

Matthew 20:20-28

As Jesus nears the end his fateful journey to Jerusalem, his instruction to the disciples becomes more direct and focused. He has been instilling kingdom integrity and initiatives into his disciples. From faith and forgiveness to conflict resolution and childlike dependence on his Father, Jesus has utilized the events of life on his way to Jerusalem to move his disciples toward kingdom maturity. This instruction now moves to

clarify the proper perspective of real kingdom authority.

As we approach verse 20, Jesus has just completed the third foretelling of his appointment with his opponents in Jerusalem. He states in Matthew 20:18-19, “the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day.” Astoundingly, his prediction was met with an opportunistic mother and her two sons, who together were vying for a privileged position within the kingdom. This grasping for authority is far from any true understanding of how the disciples should behave with a proper kingdom perspective. Jesus uses this encounter to once again teach the disciples about the extreme cost of discipleship.

On behalf of her children, the mother of James and John petitions Jesus for prominent places of leadership and authority in his kingdom. This request highlights, once again, a misunderstanding of Jesus’ mission and the nature of the kingdom. Jesus confronts her ignorance by declaring, “You do not know what you are asking.” He proceeds to extol the Father’s authority in assigning such places of prominence. This quest for power and position finds its way to the other disciples, who become ‘indignant’ at the stated request. France writes, “The natural human concern with status and importance is clearly one of the most fundamental instincts which must be unlearned by those who belong to God’s kingdom.”⁵⁶

Jesus, seizing the opportunity to instruct his disciples, gathers them and lays out the nature and pattern of kingdom authority. He begins in verse 25 by laying out the

⁵⁶France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 755.

earthly pattern of power and authority. Jesus notes that the Gentile “rulers” and “great ones” utilize their power to “lord it over them” and to “exercise authority over them.” France notes, “The two Greek verbs which I have translated ‘lord it over’ and ‘impose their authority on’ are both compounds beginning with *kata-*, “down”: they use their position at the top to ‘bear down on’ those below them in the social scale.”⁵⁷ This authority is self-seeking and self-serving. Regarding this earthly authority, France states, “They spend all their energies in order to get to the top; and, once having reached that peak, they cause all others to feel the weight of their authority.”⁵⁸

Jesus responds in verse 26 with the stern injunction regarding his disciples’ pursuit and use of authority. “It shall not be so among you.” France notes,

Verses 25-26 set out a sharp antithesis with the way earthly kingdoms and authority structures operate, and the contrast is clearly focused in the words “it is not to be like that among you.” That clause could have been written over most of the preceding pericopes in which the disciples’ ‘human thoughts’ have been painfully contrasted with the values of the kingdom of heaven; it sums up in a slogan-like form the character of Jesus’ disciples as an alternative society which was first set out in the discourse of chs. 5-7.⁵⁹

France concludes, “The point is that the values of secular society do not apply *among you*; authority and ‘greatness’ among the disciples of Jesus are the reverse of what the world is used to; true greatness is in service.”⁶⁰

Jesus moves in verses 26-27 to unequivocally instruct his disciples in the only way to properly administer kingdom authority. First, Jesus establishes that one who is

⁵⁷Ibid., 759-60.

⁵⁸William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*, New Testament Commentary, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House: 1953-2001; Logos Bible Software), 747.

⁵⁹France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 755.

⁶⁰France, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 293.

great “must be your servant.” Second, the one who is first “must be your slave.”

Blomberg writes, “Would-be leaders must become ‘servants’ or ‘slaves’. They are exempt from no menial task and lead by example rather than by dictum. Jesus’ entire thrust is on enabling and empowering others rather than wielding power for oneself.”⁶¹ In referring to “slaves,” Jesus was reaching to the lowest realm of society. Morris writes concerning this, “In the ancient world there was no one lower than a slave; the slave’s whole life is lived in service for which he can claim neither credit nor reward.”⁶²

Jesus calls his disciples to apply their authority and opportunities to the service of others. Greatness is demonstrated through the proper application and understanding of this authority. Turner quotes McNeile and his apt summary of Jesus’ instruction, *Servire est regnare*—“To serve is to reign.”⁶³ Furthermore, Osborne states, “Jesus exemplifies the new kingdom reality in which we want to ‘serve’ others rather than manipulate them to serve us.”⁶⁴

Jesus once again refers to himself as the “Son of Man,” who in Daniel 7:13-14 is given all authority and an eternal kingdom. It is through his service and other-centered application of authority that he is granted this imperial position from the Father. Nolland writes,

‘Son of Man’ here is a designation pointing to the Matthean Jesus’ awareness of his own importance. In the flow of thought we are apparently invited to see that Jesus exhibits his exalted status precisely in taking up a serving role. In the pattern of

⁶¹Blomberg, *Matthew*, 308.

⁶²Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 512.

⁶³A. H. McNeile, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (London: Macmillan, 1915), 290, quoted in Turner, *Matthew*, 487.

⁶⁴Osborne, *Matthew*, 742.

20:25 those ruled for the benefit of the rulers, but the Son of Man exhibits his preeminence precisely by giving service rather than by receiving service.⁶⁵

The one who deserved to be served and worshipped offered himself to satisfy their sin debt and to enable them to gain access into the kingdom.

Greatness can truly be measured in what it produces. Turner writes,

Matthew 20:20-28 is yet another remarkable study in the definition of authentic greatness. Fallen human cultures define greatness in terms of prestige, power, and status. . . . His definition of greatness as service turns the world's model on its head. His disciples must follow his example of sacrificial servanthood to the point of death.⁶⁶

Hendrikson continues in this same thought by adding, "Greatness consists in self-giving, in the outpouring of the self in service to others, for the glory of God. To be great means to love."⁶⁷

Jesus desires nothing less than that his disciples follow after him. He willingly gives himself as a living demonstration of the effectual application of kingdom authority. His service requires everything—for he must "give his life." He utilizes his kingly authority to serve others to the extent that he transforms their very existence by offering his perfect life as their "ransom." France writes,

The phrase *to give his life as a ransom for many* is one of the clearest statements in the New Testament of the saving effect of Jesus' death. *Lytron* ('ransom') and the preposition *anti* ('for', literally 'instead of') point clearly to the idea of his 'taking our place', as the payment of an equivalent sum of money procures the release of the captive.⁶⁸

⁶⁵Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 823-24.

⁶⁶Turner, *Matthew*, 487.

⁶⁷Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*, 487.

⁶⁸France, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 293.

Here we finally have the formation of a defined purpose, in Matthew's gospel, for which Jesus will die in Jerusalem. France writes, "the Son of Man himself, whose messianic dignity is expressed not in being served but in serving, not in receiving but in giving, and whose messianic destiny is to be fulfilled in the ultimate paradox of his death for the salvation of others."⁶⁹

Jesus' sacrificial death establishes the standard by which disciples are reconciled, as well as serving as the prime example of the radical nature of one's personal discipleship commitment. Hagner moves to his conclusion by saying, "the disciples are to be marked by the humility, servanthood, and obedience to death that characterized Jesus, in the knowledge that to suffer with him may mean to drink the cup that he drank before ultimately reigning with him."⁷⁰ The price we must pay demands that we diminish personally compared with the king, his kingdom, and those he has called us to serve.

In closing, Osborne notes that in this passage we have, "a microcosm of true discipleship, the choice between God's will and our own desires. We will become 'first' only by making ourselves 'last', and that can happen only when we pattern ourselves after Jesus."⁷¹

Conclusion

Matthew faithfully records Jesus' clear teaching regarding the cost and demands of discipleship. The disciples were personally taught and challenged with these realities and experienced them intimately as they walked with Jesus and engaged in his

⁶⁹France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 755.

⁷⁰Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 583.

⁷¹Osborne, *Matthew*, 735.

kingdom ministry. The gospel contains the message of eternal hope, life, joy, and peace. However inherent in the message is eternal death and destruction for those who reject Jesus. All true disciples will declare these two realities: life and death. Robert Plummer highlights these two realities clearly by writing, “Jesus focuses on the weighty message and consequent stewardship of the gospel commission. Jesus’ disciples announce the news that will divide for eternity the forgiven from the unforgiven. . . . Christ’s messengers must with sadness and honesty declare that the wrath of God remains on them [the unforgiven] (John 3:36).”⁷² Given the “narrow path” and “the few that find it” the disciples are well-characterized as sheep among wolves that are truly hated by the world.

This divisive message will exact a great toll from the disciple. Through it all, the disciple must reflect the character of the kingdom and be constrained by the Spirit to live-out the self-sacrificing example of the Lord Jesus Christ. Setting aside one’s rights and earthbound desires, every disciple must count the cost, take up the cross, and follow Christ.

⁷²Robert L. Plummer, “The Great Commission in the New Testament,” in *The Challenge of the Great Commission: Essays on God’s Mandate for the Local Church*, ed. Thom S. Rainer and Chuck Lawless (Crestwood, KY: Pinnacle, 2005), accessed February 5, 2015, http://www.sbts.edu/resources/files/2010/01/02sbjt_094_win05-plummer.pdf.

CHAPTER 4
PREACHING JESUS' DISCIPLESHIP INSTRUCTIONS
FROM MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

Introduction

Discipleship is a prominent thread running thru Matthew's gospel bringing unity and structure. Matthew preserves in his writing the powerful instruction that Jesus conveyed to his disciples, preparing them for the continuation of the kingdom's earthly advance in his absence. The instruction discloses foundational truths that must be understood and appropriated into the individual life of each disciple. These truths go well beyond the training of the twelve. They testify to the nature of Christ's calling as well as the accompanying convictions that must characterize every disciple. This chapter reports the implementation of my ministry project at Church of the Open Door.

The words of Jesus are given to condition the called, not to convince the curious. In the same manner, the focus of this project was to exhort and encourage those who have answered Jesus' call and have thereby committed themselves to manifest in their lives these distinctive discipleship realities. Inherent in any discipleship teaching is the message of the Gospel which calls sinners to confront their sin and surrender to Christ. In this respect, the teaching was evangelistic but it was not the primary objective.

This project addressed the responsibility of each individual member of Church of the Open Door to exemplify the call of Christ in their life and to accept the cost that accompanies such a commitment. In disclosing these truths, each member had to face

their own role and participation in the outworking of the church's ministry. Since the corporate whole represents the collective sum of the individual members, to initiate significant changes in the whole demands focused attention on the individual members. To this end, the discipleship-focused teaching has gone forth to establish the kingdom agenda that dictates the directives and demeanor of every disciple. This establishes the course for a vibrant ministry plan for Church of the Open Door as each individual member takes up their divine calling.

One of the objectives of this project was to ascertain the current understanding and attitudes of Church of the Open Door members regarding biblical discipleship. This objective was pursued through the administration of the Biblical Discipleship Survey. This survey sought to identify patterns of beliefs and practices that have impacted the church's ministry. Over the course of the past several decades, the church has seen many discipleship ministries dissolve, AWANA, Word of Life, MOPS, shepherd groups, Evangelism Explosion, etc., and as a result, individual instruction and accountability in the area of discipleship dissipated. Discipleship at Church of the Open Door appears to have become, in many respects, a cognitive endeavor which has brought on significant stagnation and corporate decline. The results have profoundly impacted the size and effectiveness of the church. This project sought to challenge the membership to radical discipleship obedience; so as to bring a transformational impact to the scope and nature of the church's overall ministry.

Another objective was to develop a ten week expository sermon series on biblical discipleship principles from the gospel of Matthew. These messages were structured around the calling and the cost of discipleship. Every disciple must face these

two realities and respond biblically to their unique demands and incorporate the accompanying divine grace to make them a reality. The objective was truly a pastoral goal that focused on the clear and effective communication of biblical truth. An evaluation rubric employed by the elders conveyed weekly feedback and assessment.

The final objective of this project was to increase the knowledge of biblical discipleship. This knowledge goal was measured by the Sermon Series Knowledge Assessment survey and was administered in a pre- and post-sermon series context. The intent of the project was to elevate the knowledge and responsibility of the calling to biblical discipleship. The focus of this objective went well beyond knowledge and truly sought to institute practical responses to the revealed truth. This project attempted to reinvigorate each member with a deeper understanding of their discipleship calling and the accompanying enablement to make it a living reality.

The implementation of this project brought the truth of God's Word to the ears of his people. The appropriation of these truths is vitally important to the health and well-being of individuals and the collective body that comprises the church. This project was undertaken because of the biblical mandate for every follower of Christ to faithfully answer the call to "follow" Christ, and fulfill his commission to "make disciples." Obedience is not an option. To this end the project was delivered for the glory of God.

Survey Administration and Outline Submissions

Biblical Discipleship Survey

The first part of this project consisted of data gathering. First, twenty members of Church of the Open Door received the Biblical Discipleship Survey (BDS). These surveys were distributed following the morning service to twenty members who

volunteered to complete and return the BDS to a box in the welcome center following the morning service. The intent of the BDS was three-fold. First the survey sought to gather general demographic information. Second, the survey sought to measure the individual's understanding of biblical discipleship. Finally, the survey was designed to ascertain information regarding the individual's perception of the practical application of discipleship throughout the ministries of the church.

The surveys were distributed during the first week of the project, prior to the start of the sermon series, and were completed by a membership sample ranging in age from 30's to 80's. Not surprisingly, all but two respondents indicated that they had been a Christian for more than twenty years. This accurately reflects the composition of the membership. Furthermore, the results indicated that two thirds of the respondents pursue discipleship through daily devotions and small group involvement, with many of them spending in excess of 10 hours a week devoted to discipleship activities. It was surprising to learn that all but two of the respondents indicated that they had been discipled in their Christian life. As I considered the first section of the survey, no respondent had come to Christ within the past eight years. Without reading too much into the voluntary nature of the survey, it certainly demonstrates the perceived need that this project seeks to address the raising up a new generation of disciples.

The Biblical Discipleship Survey confirmed in many ways my assessment of the membership detailed in the ministry context in chapter 1 with a few surprising results. Eighty-three percent of the respondents indicated that they have a good understanding of biblical discipleship. Two-thirds of them indicated that they had grown in discipleship over the past year with the same number testifying that their personal discipleship

pursuits have allowed them to share the Gospel during the past six weeks. The results were evenly divided, with 50 percent indicating that they were actively practicing biblical discipleship at Church of the Open Door.

The survey confirmed my assessment of the current ministry practices and impact of Church of the Open Door. A lack of understanding of true biblical discipleship was reflected in the weak attestation of the cost of discipleship. Only 52 percent agreed or strongly agreed that discipleship is costly. Given that half of the project was dedicated to this specific topic, the biblical exposition of Jesus' instructions in this matter directly addressed this crucial area. A significant 55 percent of the respondents indicated that Church of the Open Door needed to provide more opportunities for biblical discipleship.

However, sixty-one percent agreed that the church emphasizes biblical discipleship and seventy-two percent indicated that the sermons preached at the church challenge them in biblical discipleship. The results of the survey indicated a lack of practical biblical discipleship demonstrated in action. This is not surprising given there is little accountability from the church in this area.

A current assessment of Church of the Open Door's discipleship ministry can be discerned from the dismal thirty-three percent of the respondents who agreed or strongly agreed that the church's biblical discipleship practices are impacting the outside community. Through the eyes of two-thirds of the respondents, the church's ministry is unbalanced with a deficiency in fulfilling Jesus' commission to "Go and make disciples" as well as his charge to be light and salt to the dark and dying world. It was to this end and for this reason that this project was undertaken.

Overall, the pre-project survey was helpful in identifying some key areas of biblical discipleship that needed to be addressed. The surveyed clearly demonstrated a lack of understanding regarding the cost of personal discipleship. Furthermore, personal obedience to the command of Christ to go and make disciples was also shown to be an area that needed instruction. These two issues surfaced out of a confident group of respondents that professed a great knowledge of biblical discipleship. Second, this survey allowed the respondents to identify some deficiencies in the outworking of the church's discipleship practices. Through their own eyes and responses, they testified to the church's lack of Gospel impact in the community.

Sermon Series Knowledge Assessment

Another objective of the project was to increase the knowledge of biblical discipleship by delivering a ten week sermon series. To measure this goal, the Sermon Series Knowledge Assessment (SSKA) was developed and administered to a group of 20 members who volunteered to participate. The goal was to have a measurable increase in biblical discipleship knowledge following the ten-week sermon series. This survey was administered Sunday morning during week 1 of the project before the sermon series began. The SSKA was completed and returned the same day. These results became the initial data entered into a t-test spreadsheet.

Sermon Outlines

Phase one of this project also included the development and submission of ten main-point sermon outlines to the elders for their evaluation. These outlines were submitted before the sermons were delivered, and all ten outlines were submitted by

week three of the project. These outlines were assessed for biblical accuracy, structure, and clarity. Each sermon was also evaluated for relevant application, illustration, and a clear challenge from Scripture. The elders' observations were recorded on the Sermon Outline and Delivery Evaluation Rubric which was distributed with the outlines. The elders submitted their completed evaluations following the delivery of each message.

Sermon Delivery Phase

The second portion of the project began in the second week with the delivery of the first sermon in the series, "Something to Die For."¹ The second phase continued for the next nine weeks. On Sunday evenings, church members were invited to participate in a small group discussion of the morning sermon. This group allowed for an interactive discussion of the sermon's structure and message. Members were encouraged to raise questions regarding the content or the communication of the material. This group varied in size from thirteen to twenty-four participants and offered insightful feedback regarding the delivered material.

The sermons were developed from two primary perspectives: the calling to and the cost of discipleship. Each perspective was developed by five passages from Matthew which were then delivered sequentially through the gospel. The first sermon delivered was an introductory sermon that covered the opening chapters of Matthew and brought us to the commencement of Jesus' earthly ministry in Matthew 4:17. Together these sermons confronted every believer with the reality of Christ's call to discipleship and the resulting implications of the dawning of his kingdom.

¹Please see appendix 4 for a full listing of the sermons, titles, and sermon texts.

Sermon Sequence and Summary

Sermon 1, “Hope and Change”, examined the kingdom credentials that were inherently possessed by Jesus and attributed to him through the attestation of Matthew’s words. His gospel includes powerful declarations of his unique credentials from: an angel, the Old Testament covenants, the wise men, John the Baptist, the voice of God, Satan in the wilderness, and the prophecies of Isaiah. Examining Matthew’s portrayal of Jesus in the opening chapters, the sermon laid the foundation for one to hear Jesus’ powerful declaration, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

The sermon challenged disciples anew with the words of Christ to repent, to completely change their affections. This all-pervasive change must encompass our entire being and move us from a worldly orientation to a passionate implementation of kingdom realities in our lives. Matthew confronted us with Christ’s command to repent because of the commencement of this new, yet long anticipated, kingdom reality. The life of discipleship is a complete surrender to the King and his kingdom priorities, rendering worship and obedience.

Sermon 2, “All Things New,” focused on Jesus’ call to “Follow me” in Matthew 4:18-22. Building off of his command to repent, Jesus’ calls individuals to personally disengage from the patterns of this world and practically pursue the kingdom. The sermon focused on three specific areas in which this call is to be applied. First, disciples must commit to a new leader. The call of Christ is the initial point in anyone’s walk of discipleship. To reinforce the primacy of Jesus’ call, the self-initiated and qualified “discipleship” commitments of Matthew 8:18-22, derived from human desire,

were shown to be insufficient and unacceptable. Discipleship is not initiated by the desire of the human will. Rather, it is a response to the call of Christ.

Furthermore, this commitment carries with it the “I will” promise, which assures each individual disciple of Christ’s personal involvement in their life. Second, the call to change beckons us to commit to a new course. We must take decisive action to separate from our earthly pursuits and align ourselves with these new kingdom realities. Third, disciples are called to commit to a dependent life. These dramatic changes give evidence of one’s submission, obedience, and participation in the outworking of the kingdom. These changes must be immediate, complete, and will truly make all things new.

Sermon 3, “Reflections of Reality,” from Matthew 5:1-16, examined the character of the kingdom of heaven that must be represented in the life of a disciple. The sermon presented these kingdom character qualities which must be incarnated in the disciple’s affections. The implementation of these character traits attest to the present position of the disciple in the kingdom, laying claim to the promised blessings of the kingdom, and declaring a powerful testimony for the kingdom.

The sermon had three overarching pursuits for the disciple. First, every disciple was exhorted to be devoted to exemplifying the character of the kingdom. Second, every disciple was exhorted to be driven to commendation for obedience that results from the practical implementation of these character qualities. Third, each disciple must live out these qualities in a manner that demonstrates conviction, thereby delivering a powerful testimony that leads to glory to God.

Sermon 4, “A Hard Road, The Right Path,” from Matthew 5:38-42, focused on the conduct of disciples and held out the costly reality of discipleship; righteousness must

prevail over one's personal rights. It asserted that a disciple must be willing to absorb evil and allow their kingdom estimations to direct their responses. This sermon delivered five discipleship directives that need to condition the conduct of all disciples. First, every disciple must be directed by righteousness. Second, it is incumbent upon each disciple to be dependent upon their relationship with God, convinced of his power over and ultimate judgment of evil. Third, it was shown that this passage maintains a requirement that every disciple must be disciplined with righteous objectives. A disciple cannot waver in this area and still maintain the integrity of the kingdom. Only when you stand in righteousness can you truly stand with God. Fourth, discipleship demands action that must be fervently applied to difficult situations. In this, the sermon called for a discipleship commitment that is extremely practical and visible. Finally, the sermon demonstrated that discipleship must lead to the diffusing of evil. Decisive action is required to mitigate evil and this is the message of the Gospel. Therefore, these unrighteous and trying situations are an invitation to powerfully live out the Gospel.

Sermon 5, "Affected by Authority," focused on Matthew 8:5-13, and clearly disclosed the currency of the kingdom of heaven. A disciple is able to have kingdom realities and blessings applied to the circumstance of life through a vibrant and expressive faith. Discipleship demands faith. Furthermore, this faith will distinguish a disciple from others and will be disclosed through decisive action.

This sermon started with a clear presentation of the frail human condition. It is this frailty that compels a disciple to appropriate the power of Christ through faith. This message was built on four main points. First, faith rests in the authority of Christ. As disciples we have the opportunity to appropriate Christ's authority into our need-filled

situations. Second, Jesus' words encourage disciples to a passionate faith by showing that such expressions find affirmation. Third, the sermon encouraged a vibrant faith by demonstrating that it, not heritage, will secure the covenantal promises and fulfillments. Faith has always been the key to the covenants. Since the kingdom is the fulfillment of these, faith remains the means of entrance. Fourth, the passage clearly maintained that faith in Christ receives the application of his authority. The hand of God is moved by the faith he provides.

Sermon 6, "Dangerous Demands," drawn from Matthew 10:16-23, exposed the commitment required of a disciple. The high cost of genuine discipleship was clearly articulated in this discussion on commitment. Jesus' declaration that "you will be hated by all for my name's sake" must challenge the convictions of all who claim to be disciples. Without apology, the dangerous calling of a disciple was presented to encourage a sincere embrace of this reality and to encourage each disciple to stand firm in the face of adversity.

This sermon was built on three main tenets. First, disciples are vulnerable. The earthly situation of disciples is dangerous by design. Disciples must accept this reality and decidedly move forward. Second, disciples are a vehicle of divine testimony. Disciples are to declare the glory of God and testify to his power despite the hatred of the world. Third, disciples will be vindicated. The Son of Man is coming and with him comes divine recompense. The promise of salvation is offered to those who endure to the end. Disciples continue to engage the hostile world with an undaunted commitment to the commands of Christ.

Sermon 7, “Courageous Conversations,” from Matthew 10:26-33, detailed the confidence that must exude from disciples. Because of their position in Christ, disciples must fearlessly engage the world with confidence and conviction. Threats and actions can erode conviction, but a true disciple of Christ will look beyond the earth-bound implications of these, and fully invest themselves in the reality of the kingdom.

This sermon was built on four pillars of truth. These truths lay the foundation for confidence in the life of a disciple. First, discipleship receives its confidence from the Authority of God. He is sovereign and retains ultimate control in the circumstances of life and death. Second, discipleship is encouraged and supported by confidence in the Word of God. The content of God’s Word gives us wisdom beyond this world’s understanding. Its truth inherently demands proclamation. Every disciple must accept the declaratory nature of their calling while understanding they are equipped with the revelation of divine truth. Third, the all-pervasive nature of the power of God must infuse bold confidence into the life of every disciple. God has complete control over the very essence of life, the soul. The world can inflict punishment only to the extent of its reach, the physical life. The life of every disciple must be viewed from the perspective of eternity. For it is only there that the call and the resultant life of discipleship make sense. This brings us to the fourth pillar, confidence in the promises of God. Discipleship looks beyond this fleeting life and rests confidently in the great promises of God. Therefore, fear not and proclaim that we have something to die for.

Sermon 8, “A Costly Consideration,” was preached on Resurrection Sunday from Matthew 16:24-28. The victory of Christ over the cross and death gives us the impetus to follow him on the hard road of discipleship. As we celebrate we must

remember the cost that Jesus unashamedly lays before every disciple. The sermon articulated the call to disciples to follow the pattern of submission that Jesus modeled in his obedience to the Father. Jesus promised that our submission and sharing in his sufferings would produce eternal victory.

The pursuit of Christ and participation in his victory come at a high cost. This message was delivered utilizing four main avenues. First, the pursuit of Christ entails following him on the path of self-denial, self-deprecation, and self-sacrifice. Discipleship involves the loss of “self” and requires a complete submission which is pictured in the cross. Second, the paradox of discipleship confounds the logic and reason of humanity. In our surrender and submission we secure and solidify our standing. A disciple must lose to win. Third, the priority of a disciple must be one’s soul. Permanence must establish the priority. Finally, the promise of the Son of Man, secured through his death and resurrection, must establish certainty in our hearts and confidence in our steps to lay down our life, take up our cross, and follow him. The celebration of the resurrection inherently declares the high cost of discipleship. It is indeed a costly consideration.

Sermon 9, “Serving with Authority,” from Matthew 20:20-28, conveyed the necessity of an unquestioning conviction to serve. Disciples must be convinced of their divine appointment to utilize kingdom authority in service to others. From the negative example of the grasping of power by James and John, Jesus exhorts his disciples to pursue a life characterized by humble service. The sermon looked at power and authority in the light of this teaching.

This ninth sermon directly addressed the pursuit, the problem, the pattern, and the intended power of authority, especially as it relates to the kingdom. First, the sermon

identified the natural inclination of all people to reach for more power. From the Garden of Eden onward, the accumulation of power has been the allure and the trap of all humanity. The existence of power brings us to the second point; the problem with power is abuse. The self-centered wielding of power destroys the benevolent intention of it. Discipleship demands the mortification of any abuse of power or authority. In the third point, Jesus goes a step further and demands the implementation of the only right pattern of authority, which is service. Authority and kingdom power makes servants and slaves. It obligates the disciple to faithfully invest the power and authority in the outworking of the kingdom. The final point underscored the power of kingdom authority in securing a multiplied impact. If this power is to be selfishly preserved, it will be squandered. However, the power of kingdom authority rightly administered produces an unbelievable return. Disciples must utilize any authority they possess in humble service.

Sermon 10, “Delegated Authority,” from Matthew 28:16-20, declared Jesus’ commission to his disciples. The sermon stated that disciples are enlisted into a life-long commitment of disciple making. On account of Christ’s complete authority, disciples are to move forward in obedient service and pass on what they have received. The commission is conveyed with great authority and contains a great promise.

This final sermon in the series highlighted three important aspects of the Great Commission. First, Christ’s possession of all authority, granted to him by the Father at his resurrection, is the security behind this commission. Disciples are to make new disciples because Christ has commanded it by the declaration of his will. This is rightly established by his authority. Second, Christ sends them out on a delegated mission. As he concludes his earthly ministry, Jesus delegates his earthly kingdom work to the disciples.

These will in turn continue to increase the participants in the commission. The third and final point, exhorted the disciples to consider the decisive promise that Christ gave to the disciples, his very presence. The bodily presence of Christ will be removed from the immediate, physical presence of his disciples. However, he will accompany his disciples as they continue to fulfill his commission. The promise of Christ's continued presence must continue to encourage us to faithful obedience to this great commission. Go forth with his delegated authority.

Sermon Outline and Delivery Evaluation Rubric

The ten sermon outlines were submitted to the elders of Church of the Open Door during the first three weeks of the project. All outlines were submitted prior to the preaching of that particular sermon. The outlines were homiletical in nature. They articulated the structure and development of the homiletical thought and argument. Furthermore, each outline was submitted with correlating verses and passages that supported the homiletical assertions. Feedback was solicited for the structure, integrity, authorial intent, and clarity of the material presented.

A second aspect of the rubric was an assessment and evaluation of the preaching event itself. The scope of this assessment covered three main areas. First, each elder assessed the relevancy of the sermon's subject matter and applications. Second, the elders were asked to evaluate the illustrations that were used and to assess if they resonated with the audience. Third, the elders listened intently for a clear challenge from the sermon. Did the sermon require something of the listener?

On the day of preaching a particular sermon, an expanded outline was distributed to the elders. This allowed the elders a more detailed examination of the sermonic development and structure. At times there was discussion before the sermon but generally the outline served as map for the delivery of the sermon. Furthermore, the submission of the detailed outline allowed for greater accountability during the preaching event. These evaluation rubrics were usually completed and returned to me before the end of the day. The rubric also served as discussion guide with individual elders at times.

Post-Sermon Survey Administration

Following the final sermon, in week eleven of the project, the Sermon Series Knowledge Assessment (SSKA) was administered a second time to allow for a quantitative basis in assessing the effectiveness of the sermon series. Twenty surveys were made available to the voluntary participants that completed the first survey. These surveys were completed and returned immediately following the service. The results from these surveys were matched up with the corresponding pre-sermon surveys and the results were entered into the t-test spreadsheet for data analysis.

Conclusion

The challenge of every generation throughout the history of the church has been to faithfully answer the call to discipleship and to obediently live out that divine initiative. The biblical record shows that this struggle is not a new phenomenon in the life of the church. In the New Testament, Jude writes to the believers exhorting them to watch out for the integrity of the faith and the fidelity of the church's teaching. He writes in verses 3-4,

Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

With such a plea, it is incumbent upon every church to guard what is entrusted to it and to ensure faithfulness on our watch. To this end I revisited the fundamentals of discipleship and levied a fresh challenge to the members of Church of the Open Door in Fayetteville, North Carolina. Only as individuals can we answer the call to discipleship.

However, it is required of every church to reinforce the importance of and have its ministry developed around discipleship and the Great Commission. Somewhere, individuals have lost their way and have wandered away from these foundational imperatives, “follow me” and “make disciples.” The decline in spiritual growth and church health is often traced back to a neglect of these two commands. Often the chosen course of action includes the integration of cultural trends or popular ideologies to usher in new vitality and growth. These movements perpetuate the slide away from biblical truth and are ultimately doomed to failure because they forsake the mandate of Christ.

The individuals that comprise each church must confront the call of the Lord Jesus Christ on their life. In doing so each person must understand what that entails. Believers must revisit the call of Christ on their lives which demands vibrant faith, godly character, undeterred commitment, unflinching confidence, and culminates in their obedient reception of the delegation of his authority in the Great Commission.

Furthermore, believers must answer Christ’s call with passion and conviction. The calling is hard and the cost is high. However, it is the only path to life, vitality, peace, and fulfillment. A return to discipleship needs to characterize all believers and go

forth to raise up a new generation of disciples who will count the cost, take up their cross, condition their responses, and give themselves in kingdom service.

Through the course of this project and the sermon series “Something to Die For,” the Word of God was opened and expounded. The truth of God was declared. As a minister of the Gospel, that is my primary responsibility and duty. I pray that the Word of God fell on receptive hearts and the Spirit of God brought conviction, instruction, and encouragement. I can testify to these outcomes in my own life, and I thank God for his gracious patience and provision. It is a privilege to stand and declare the Word of God. I pray that my pursuits in ministry will always be characterized by a faithful following of the Lord and a demonstrated life of obedience to all that he has commanded.

CHAPTER 5

ASSESSMENT AND CONCLUSION OF THE PROJECT

The emphasis of this project was strategically focused on the exposition of discipleship imperatives from Matthew's gospel to the congregation of the Church of the Open Door in Fayetteville, North Carolina. Over the past twenty years the church has witnessed a dramatic decline in membership and ministry. Although one can identify significant events that have had definite impact upon the church, it must be maintained that the underlying focus and mission of the church has not changed. The purpose and calling of the church has remained constant since Christ established the church at Pentecost. This project sought to bring essential truths to light and expose every attender of the church to the high calling of following Christ and the resulting implications and demands. With such a focus on the Word of God, the fundamental ingredients for both individual and corporate spiritual health were declared. From that standpoint the declaratory emphasis of the project has been fulfilled.

The designated purpose of this project was to preach a ten-week series of expository messages on biblical discipleship from the Gospel of Matthew. This purpose was designed to bring a fresh discipleship perspective to the forefront of the discussion as the church moves forward in making significant decisions regarding the future of the ministry. Discipleship must characterize the church if it is going to be a vibrant place of

worship, praise, growth, and strength. Individuals and the corporate body of believers both share a great responsibility in making this a reality.

Evaluation of the Project Purpose

As stated above, the designated purpose of this project was to preach a ten-week series of expository messages on biblical discipleship from the Gospel of Matthew. This was undertaken to lead the members of Church of the Open Door to increase their participation in biblical discipleship, both personally and corporately. Discipleship impacts every believer and must condition the ministry of every church. This subject is vitally important to the health and strength of any ministry.

A great challenge for the church today is establishing biblically-rooted discipleship convictions and practices in the lives of its members. In the American context, these discipleship imperatives challenge our treasured rights and conflict with the ease and comfort of life that we have grown to expect. The call to repentance and the call to follow Christ is muted by our desires, our culture, and by the practices of many churches.

The project directly challenged cost-free Christian living. Commitment requires sacrifice and one must be willing to pay the ultimate price for following Christ. As cultural forces continue to consolidate their energy against Christ's followers, the precepts of this project become more pronounced, prophetic, and glaringly applicable. This project sought to raise up a congregation that will courageously accept rejection and scorn on account of their identity with Christ. We must prepare our members for the wrath of the world. Hatred of Christ and his righteousness is multiplying all around us and an uninformed, unprepared church will be assimilated into the godless forces of

culture and humanism. Christ predicted it and he prepared us for it – will we listen? The purpose of this project was completed in full and it will continue to dramatically impact the course and pattern of ministry at Church of the Open Door.

Evaluation of the Project Goals

The first goal of this project was to evaluate the current understanding of biblical discipleship among the membership of Church of the Open Door. The Biblical Discipleship Survey was successfully administered and it secured a sufficient amount of data to gain greater insight into the understanding of personal discipleship. Furthermore, the data also provided great insight into the members' perception of the application of biblical discipleship at Church of the Open Door. This goal was not successfully accomplished according to the stipulations laid out in Chapter 1 because only eighteen of the twenty surveys were returned and analyzed. However, the returned surveys comprised about twenty percent of the membership which provided an adequate sample size.

The second goal was to develop and deliver a ten week, expository sermon series consisting of key discipleship principles presented in Matthew's gospel. The sermon series offered deep insights into the calling and cost of discipleship. This goal was measured by the Sermon Outline and Delivery Evaluation Rubric and measured the sermon outlines and presentations for biblical accuracy, structure, simple clarity, appropriate applications, quality of illustrations, and a clear challenge to action. The goal was successfully accomplished as the completed rubrics listed 90 percent of the criteria exemplary, 9 percent of the criteria as sufficient, and 1 percent of the criteria as requiring attention. The two criteria that were marked "requires attention" both indicated a

significant straying from the outline that in their estimation affected the communication of the message.

The third goal of the project was to increase the knowledge of biblical discipleship through the delivery of the sermon series. This goal was measured by the Sermon Series Knowledge Assessment (SSKA). The administration of the SSKA survey commenced week one of the project and the second administration of the survey concluded the project in week 11. The data from these two assessments was used in a t-test for dependent samples. The method for pairing the pre- and post-sermon assessments did not work well within the sampled group, producing only seven matched pairs of data. Many of the post-sermon assessments were returned without the identifying numbers necessary for pairing. With only a small sample to analyze, it is not surprising that the t-test for dependent samples did not conclude that the teaching of discipleship principles to the select group of median adults made a statistically significant difference resulting in the increase of their discipleship knowledge ($t_{(6)} = 1.653$, $p < .149$). However, I will note that of the small sample submitted for analysis, 5 of the 7 surveys demonstrated a statistical increase between the 2 with the total increase showing an average increase of 4 points per survey.

Strength of the Project

The first strength of the project must be the declaration and exposition and of biblical truth. The teaching that comprised this project was powerful and impactful because it was taken directly from the authoritative Word of God. The members of Church of the Open Door were challenged to once again consider the personal implications of the gracious call of Christ on their lives. At times the message was painful

and costly, yet it always conveyed the hope, confidence, and the enduring promises of Christ. This project was not composed of lofty ideals and culturally-tested notions. The precepts of God challenged everyone who heard the teaching of this project.

The second strength of this project was the focused attention given to the necessity of Christ's efficacious call. Discipleship was shown to be derived from a focus on what Christ has done and continues to do in the lives of his children. We cannot of our own reason or volition make anyone a disciple. However, through surrendered obedience, Christ utilizes us in his eternal work. We must come back to the plain and simple command, "follow me and I will." It is compelling and comforting.

The third strength of this project was the clarion call for a committed embrace of costly discipleship. In an age of easy believism and cheap grace, there is a dearth of biblical conviction regarding the cost of discipleship. The promises of persecution, surrender, service, and losing one's life do not bring the crowds in or tickle the ears of the masses. However, these plain truths will sustain the faithful and preserve the confessing church in the hours of intense pressure and difficulty.

A fourth strength of this project was the intense focus placed on the numerous promises of God. These promises must become the treasured possession of every disciple. They are windows into eternity and continue to draw our eyes off the things of this world and establish a new focal point for our affections. It is through the transformation of our affections that we can truly begin to enjoy the reality of the kingdom here on earth. Discipleship was shown to be an avenue of eternal engagement in the earthly realm.

Lastly, the project cast the book of Matthew in a new light at Church of the Open Door. Through my theological approach, I pulled Matthew out of the rigid Dispensational box which has historically limited the application of Matthew to the Jews, and presented to the church Christ's exhortation and promise to his people. This project presented the Gospel of Matthew through the lens of a New Testament theology. In doing so, it unleashed a more comprehensive understanding of its message in light of what God was doing in his redemptive unfolding of history in Christ. The words of Matthew found new application and emphasis as the universal perspective of Christ's ministry was detailed and presented before the church. This perspective demonstrated that Christ's ministry of fulfillment to Israel established a seamless transition for the faithful people of God into the burgeoning church for this new chapter of redemption history. God's plan for Israel was not set aside or delayed but rather it found its fundamental fulfillment in Christ. He in turn deposited this faith community into the church. This truth brings great unity to the testaments and demonstrates the beautiful continuation and unity of God's redemptive plan.

Weaknesses of the Project

The first weakness of the project was that it did not provide an appropriate system of data collection and follow-up for the Biblical Discipleship Survey (BDS) and the Sermon Series Knowledge Assessment (SSKA). The distribution of these instruments was completely voluntary with no record of the individual participants. This was a dreadful mistake. There should have been a record of each participant in the sample group. This would have created a means of accountability and follow-up. Furthermore, the SSKA should have included a sticky note to record and securely keep the personal

identity code for the duration of the project. This oversight in planning had a tremendous impact on assessing the knowledge goals of the project. It was totally unexpected that I would receive back so many SSKAs without the unique identifying number.

A second weakness of the project was a complete lack of emphasis or teaching on prayer. Matthew includes several passages on this very subject and its vital connection to discipleship. Looking back over the body of material covered in this project, I cannot say that any area of presentation should have been dropped in favor of prayer. However the indispensability of prayer in the life of every disciple demands its inclusion in this discussion.

A third weakness of the project was a lack of homework or extended reading related to the project. The study was engaging and was received with great excitement. I missed a great opportunity to harness that and parlay it into deeper study and growth. A list of additional resources would have been a great tool to accompany each topic covered in the project.

A final weakness was the lack of a personal action plan for each discipleship initiative presented. The pursuit of knowledge was a lofty goal but the pursuit of faithful practice would have been more beneficial for the individual and the kingdom. Knowledge is safer and easier to pursue than practice. There was really no direct means of accountability overseeing the implementation of the knowledge received. Each sermon contained a challenge and a call to action. However, my emphasis was squarely on the transmission of biblical knowledge and doctrine. The last thing we need is more knowledge without application.

What I Would Do Differently

One of the first adjustments I would make to the project would be to develop an instrument to collect sermon feedback and evaluation from the congregation as a whole not just the elders. I feel that I lost a great opportunity to hear from the general audience regarding the content and style of my communication. The elders, given their deep understanding of the faith, will perceive the message through the lens of maturity that is not necessarily the standard of the general congregation. Since I would fall in the same category as the elders, it would be wise to solicit evaluation from outside this segment of the congregation.

Second, the Sunday evening discussion of the sermon was never officially incorporated into the official design of the project. I would definitely have utilized this opportunity more effectively if I would have devised a specific plan for this time. The discussion and input that I received was very helpful and the opportunity for the congregation to dialog over the sermon content was very engaging and beneficial. I wish I would have developed practical application exercises that would have unpacked the knowledge and modeled some of the actions that must arise out of the teaching.

Third, I missed a great opportunity for the integration of personal testimonies into the teaching ministry of the church. Church of the Open Door has many godly examples that could have been used to exemplify the principles that were covered. Instead of trying to illustrate every sermon, I would try to find some powerful testimonies contained in the congregation. This would really personalize the application and place it squarely in the realm of possibility among the members of the congregation.

Personal Reflections

As I ventured deep into the verses of Matthew's gospel, I was deeply awed by the grace of God in some new and powerful ways. Having examined and studied the book closely, I was able to witness the intervention of the sovereign God in the desperate lives and circumstances of frail humanity. Jesus did not surround himself with great men and women; rather, Jesus gathered the weak, broken, and dreadfully inadequate giving them an opportunity to be used greatly by God. Even then, their imperfections were glaringly obvious, but that did not stop the sovereign Lord from utilizing them in some earth-shattering ways. To the wise and accomplished, he held out truth with an eternal perspective to humble their pride. To the religious he presented the necessity of true righteousness and exposed their utter sinfulness. He didn't leave anyone untouched. Some received a call while others heard only condemnation.

Discipleship can appear to be complex, arduous, or even foolish. Yet it is the path of purpose and peace. Discipleship in my mind began to distill around two important topics: worship and authority. It was these two things that Adam surrendered in the garden and they continue to be the focal point of everyone's life. Who will receive one's worship? And who possesses the authority over one's life? The answers to these questions define discipleship.

Jesus entered into the created realm and himself faced these two questions. Satan's greatest endeavor in his temptation of Christ was to secure his worship. Jesus responded in Matthew 4:10: "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'" In Jesus' pointed declaration we see these two areas of worship and authority, come into sharp focus. The preservation of true

worship and authority was demonstrated by Christ through obedience. That obedience, which culminates at the cross, stands as the glorious picture of the righteousness that beckons everyone to hear Christ's message: "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Only in Christ are worship and authority rightly applied and only through him can we rightly apply the worship capabilities and authority that we possess.

In light of this we must evaluate how we spend our time in ministry. Are we addressing the fundamental issues of the heart? Are we growing men and women in the likeness of Christ? Are we pointing them to the source of righteousness? Discipleship must become the focal point of every individual believer. And this individual pursuit must impact the corporate ministry of the church as well.

Throughout my months of study, I have been continually reminded and convicted of my failure to obediently offer my worship and surrender of my authority. Through his Word and the work of his Spirit in my life, I have grown immensely in the area of discipleship. Christ continues to lead me on to greater obedience and faithfulness. Anytime we examine the great truths of Scripture we must be humbled as it exposes our guilt and shame. Yet at the same time, it must encourage us as we consider the obedience of Christ and the gracious offer of his righteousness. God still uses weak and inadequate people to demonstrate his overcoming power. This is the message of the Gospel that undergirds discipleship and gives vitality to my life and the church.

During the course of this project I have been blessed through the deep and meaningful interactions that I have had with the members of Church of the Open Door. They have truly sharpened my thinking and challenged my understanding of discipleship. Many of them serve as examples and role models of faithfulness and maturity. It is a

great blessing to serve alongside them and labor with them in the church. Furthermore, I have been carried through this process by their fervent prayer and encouragement. Through this process I have been thoroughly convinced that discipleship must be individually appropriated but discipleship also needs the support and encouragement of others to make it a reality. This accountability and support is one of the great blessings of a church family.

Conclusion

Discipleship must be the passionate endeavor of every believer. Discipleship must also be one of the primary focuses of the local church ministry. Together, individuals and the corporate body of believers must share a deep passion for discipleship and foster its application across the entire spectrum of life and ministry. Church of the Open Door must carefully examine its ministry practices and evaluate their effectiveness in equipping and making disciples. The long period of decline in participation and ministry is evidence of misplaced priorities and wasted opportunity.

Jesus' kingdom initiative is moving forward and the Gospel is still transforming lives. The problem cannot be the message because it is accomplishing its work with precision and power. Along the way, the church has surrendered its worship to something other than Christ alone and we have asserted our authority in some misguided ways. I fear that we have made discipleship and ministry a complex structure that has led to paralysis or lethargy. The call of Christ to a life of discipleship is clear and simple, "Follow me." The accompanying promise is just as clear, "I will make you..." The hope

and promise of discipleship is readily available for all who hear the call and obediently follow in faith.

We have heard the call of Christ at Church of the Open Door. He has spoken clearly through his Word. The path of Christ has been clearly illuminated. But are we willing to pay the price? Are we willing to lay down our authority and expectations for the cause of Christ? I am growing more encouraged every day as I see these discipleship realities embraced and employed. The vision of the kingdom is pulling us out of the self-centered patterns of the past and the urgency of the times is stirring us into action. Christ's call is being heard with greater clarity and the centrality of the Gospel is again being applied to the circumstances of life. This is a hard road that is marked with personal pain and loss. Yet it is the only road that leads to life and eternal usefulness. We do have something to die for. May we live to that end. May Christ alone be the object of our life and may our obedience to him compel us to take up our cross and follow him.

APPENDIX 1

BIBLICAL DISCIPLESHIP SURVEY

This survey was given to twenty members of Church of the Open Door to assess their current understanding and application of biblical discipleship. This survey was completed during week 1 of the project.

BIBLICAL DISCIPLESHIP SURVEY

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify the current understanding and practices of biblical discipleship of the participant and the church. This research is being conducted by Jon Wixtrom for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

Directions: Please answer the questions by circling your answer or filling in your answer in the space provided.

Section 1: Demographic information and general questions.

1. Please circle your age group:
18-20 20-30 31-40 41-50 51-60 61-70 71+
2. Please circle your gender:
Male Female
3. Please circle how long you have been a Christian:
0-3 years 4-7 years 8-12 years 13-19 years 20+years
4. Please circle how long you have attended Church of the Open Door:
0-3 years 4-7 years 8-12 years 13-19 years 20+years
5. Please indicate how many hours a week you devote to discipleship activities? _____
6. Are daily devotions a part of your discipleship activities? _____
7. Are you currently in a discipleship relationship with an individual/small group? _____
8. Have you been individually disciplined in your Christian life? _____
9. Are you actively pursuing discipleship? _____
10. Was there a lapse in time between your conversion and consistent discipleship? _____

Please continue to the next page

Directions: Answer the following questions: Please indicate your answer by circling the appropriate response according to the following scale: SD = strongly disagree, D = disagree, DS = disagree somewhat, AS = agree somewhat, A = agree, SA = strongly agree.

Section 2a: Personal questions relating to Biblical Discipleship

- | | | | | | | |
|--|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 1. I have a good understanding of biblical discipleship. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 2. Discipleship is the pursuit of my life. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 3. I have grown in discipleship over the past year. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 4. I understand biblical discipleship to be an individual pursuit. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 5. Most of my discipleship pursuits are prayer and Bible study. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 6. Discipleship is very demanding and costly. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 7. Christ is honored by my discipleship practices. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 8. I have given careful attention to a specific area of discipleship over the past year. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 9. Biblical discipleship characterizes my life. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 10. My biblical discipleship pursuits have allowed me to share the gospel in the past six weeks. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

Section 2b: Church of the Open Door's (COD) application of Biblical Discipleship

- | | | | | | | |
|---|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 11. COD emphasizes biblical discipleship. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 12. The sermons preached at COD challenge me in biblical discipleship. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 13. The ministries of COD provide me with the opportunity to grow in biblical discipleship. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

Please continue to the next page

- | | | | | | | | |
|-----|--|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 14. | COD needs to provide more opportunities for biblical discipleship. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 15. | Biblical discipleship at COD is impacting the outside community. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 16. | Biblical discipleship at COD is mostly a cognitive exercise. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 17. | The leadership of COD consists of men committed to biblical discipleship. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 18. | COD gives me the opportunity to participate in a communal expression of biblical discipleship. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 19. | I am held accountable for my pursuit of biblical discipleship at COD. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 20. | Pursuing biblical discipleship at COD is rewarding. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 21. | I am actively participating in biblical discipleship at COD. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 22. | COD clearly reinforces Christ's call to discipleship. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

Thank you for participating in this assessment. Please place this completed form in the box provided.

APPENDIX 2

SERMON OUTLINE EVALUATION RUBRIC

This evaluation rubric was employed by the elders to evaluate the sermon outlines that were received during weeks 1 to 3 of the project. The rubric measured the biblical accuracy, structure, and simple clarity of each sermon outline. In addition to this, the rubric measured factors involved in the delivery of the sermon.

Sermon Outline Evaluation Rubric					
Sermon Outline # _____					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The sermon is faithful to the Word of God					
The theme and content of the sermon is faithful to Matthew's theology and intent.					
The sermon utilizes other Scriptures, when available, to support the homiletical assertions.					
The homiletical thesis is clearly stated and succinct.					
The supporting points are clear, valid, and theologically in line with Matthew's intent.					
The sermon is structured with simple clarity.					

Post-Sermon Assessment

The subject matter and applications were contextualized and relevant to the audience.					
The illustrations were current and resonated with the audience.					
There was a clear challenge from the content of the sermon.					

APPENDIX 3

SERMON SERIES KNOWLEDGE ASSESSMENT

This survey was given to twenty members of Church of the Open Door to assess their knowledge of biblical discipleship. The pre-series assessment was completed during week 1 of the project and the same assessment was given post-series and completed during week 11.

SERMON SERIES KNOWLEDGE ASSESSMENT

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify the current understanding and practices of biblical discipleship of the participant and the church. This research is being conducted by Jon Wixtrom for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

_____ Please enter a four digit number of your own choosing on the line provided to give me the means of comparing your two assessments while still concealing your identity. The same number will need to be recorded on both the pre-series and post-series assessments.

Directions: Answer the following questions: Please indicate your answer by circling the appropriate response according to the following scale: SD = strongly disagree, D = disagree, DS = disagree somewhat, AS = agree somewhat, A = agree, SA = strongly agree.

1. Biblical discipleship is a key theme of the Gospel of Matthew SD D DS AS A SA
2. Biblical discipleship begins with an intention of one's will. SD D DS AS A SA
3. Biblical discipleship is an individual matter. SD D DS AS A SA
4. Biblical discipleship is the application of faith to life. SD D DS AS A SA
5. Biblical discipleship is required of all believers. SD D DS AS A SA
6. Biblical discipleship is costly. SD D DS AS A SA
7. Biblical discipleship is related to the kingdom of God. SD D DS AS A SA
8. Biblical discipleship is primarily the practice of spiritual disciplines. SD D DS AS A SA

Please turn over and continue.

- | | | | | | | |
|---|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 9. Biblical discipleship is a matter of community. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 10. Biblical discipleship is secured by faith. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 11. Biblical discipleship requires revelation from God. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 12. Biblical discipleship is the primary means of church growth. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 13. Biblical discipleship is a spiritual endeavor that affects my moral behavior and goals. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 14. Biblical discipleship is really an issue of authority. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 15. Biblical discipleship can be mistaken for legalism. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 16. Biblical discipleship is best characterized by total surrender. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 17. Biblical discipleship is only verifiable through action. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 18. Biblical discipleship in Matthew is specifically for Israelites. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 19. Biblical discipleship is the test of a true Christian. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |
| 20. Biblical discipleship is clearly displayed in our body of believers. | SD | D | DS | AS | A | SA |

Thank you for completing this assessment. Please place your completed forms in the box provided in the Welcome Center.

APPENDIX 4

“SOMETHING TO DIE FOR” SERMON SERIES

This is a listing of the ten sermons from the Gospel of Matthew that comprised the sermon series: “Something to Die For.” The sermons are listed sequentially in the order in which they were preached.

Sermon Theme	Sermon Title	Sermon Text (Matt)
1. Kingdom Credentials	“Hope and Change”	4:12-17, (1:1-4:11)
2. Kingdom Call	“All Things New”	4:18-22, (8:18-22)
3. Kingdom Character	“Reflecting Reality”	5:1-16
4. Kingdom Conduct	“A Hard Road, The Right Path”	5:38-42
5. Kingdom Currency	“Affected by Authority”	8:5-13
6. Kingdom Commitment	“Dangerous Demands”	10:16-23
7. Kingdom Confidence	“Courageous Conversations”	10:26-33
8. Kingdom Cost	“A Costly Consideration”	16:24-28
9. Kingdom Conviction	“Serving with Authority”	20:20-28
10. Kingdom Commission	“Delegated Authority”	28:16-20

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ABSTRACT

PREACHING A SERMON SERIES ON BIBLICAL DISCIPLESHIP FROM THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW AT CHURCH OF THE OPEN DOOR, FAYETTEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA

Jon Lewis Wixtrom, D.Min.
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Robert L. Plummer

This project seeks to exhort the members of Church of the Open Door to passionate obedience to the discipleship calling and commissioning of Christ. Chapter 1 introduces Church of the Open Door and establishes the historical context necessitating this focused instruction. Chapter 2 provides the biblical and theological basis for Matthew's recording of Jesus' call and commission to a life discipleship. Chapter 3 provides the biblical and theological basis for Matthew's recording of Jesus' instruction on the cost of discipleship. Chapter 4 discusses the methodology of the project and details the exposition of the sermon series "Something to Die For." Chapter 5 analyzes and evaluates the results of the project and includes theological and personal reflection on the project.

VITA

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