

## Appearance to 500 Disciples & Great Commission Matthew 28:16-20; Mark 16:15-18; I Cor. 15:6

### Appearances of Jesus after the Resurrection:

1. Mary at the tomb – John 20:11-18
2. Woman leaving the tomb – Matt. 28:9-10
3. Two followers on the road to Emmaus – Luke 24:13-32
4. Peter – Luke 24:34
5. 10 of the 11 disciples – no Thomas – John 20:19-25
6. 11 disciples – Thomas (8 days later) John 20:26-31
7. 7 disciples on the shore of the Sea of Galilee – John 21:1-25
8. 500+ disciples and followers in Galilee – I Cor. 15:6
9. James the brother of Jesus – I Cor. 15:7
10. 11 disciples at the ascension – Acts 1:3-11

Matthew 28:18-20 has long been called the Great Commission. Often it is taught together with the ascension but in reality, Jesus gave this command to His disciples on a hillside in Galilee. Many scholars will harmonize the last events of Jesus by placing the appearance to 500 followers at this time. Jesus will reveal the spreading of the Gospel will be empowered and overseen by Himself, but the work must be done by His followers!

### I. A Great Appointment

**“Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain ( Gk – hill country) where Jesus had appointed them. (“After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep” I Cor. 15:6) And when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted (Gk – hesitated).” Matthew 28:16-17**

“Jesus had appointed them” – Jesus and even an angel in the tomb had told them to go to Galilee. (Matt. 26:32; 28:7, 10) The disciples remained in Jerusalem for at least a week, until Thomas also had seen Jesus and was convinced, He was risen. A conversation of an exact location is not recorded in Scripture, but it does say Jesus appointed the place. This makes sense, much of Jesus’ public ministry was done in Galilee and many of His followers were from this area. Some believe that it could have been the same hillside where the Sermon on the Mount was taught. It would have been a logical, secluded location with plenty of open space familiar to Jesus’ followers.

“five hundred brethren at once” – Of course, we are not positive that these 500 saw Jesus at the time of the giving of the Great Commission, but the spectrum of reactions to Christ seem to indicate two different groups--- worshippers and doubters. Still, whenever the appearance, the vast number made this a very important event. The masses of people with their eyewitness testimony would become a very powerful tool in convincing people of the resurrection of Christ and the building of the early church even 25 years after the resurrection.

“they worshipped him: but some doubted.” – The disciples, who had come through a period of doubt, now were confirmed believers in Jesus’ resurrection; and then there are others who hesitated at the thought of His resurrection.

## II. A Great Commission

**“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power (Gk - authority – lordship over all) is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach (Gk - disciple) all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost (“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” Mark 16:16): Teaching (Gk - disciple) them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: (“And these signs (divine credentials) shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues (languages never learned); They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.” Mark 16:17-18) and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world (Gk - age). Amen.” Matthew 28:18-20**

“All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth” – The time of Jesus’ humiliation, sacrifice, servanthood, disgrace, and shame was over! God had accepted His obedient death on the cross. Matthew Henry pointed out that the disciples “had no reason to be ashamed of Christ crucified when they saw Him thus glorified.” p. 1518, **Christ now had God-given authority** in heaven and on earth! Acts 2:36; Phil. 2:9-10 “All power” is an astounding claim. Jesus is speaking as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords! A power that extends to heaven and earth is boundless in its reach—no earthly power has the ability to thwart it! Christ’s authority gives us the confidence to obey Him without fear! No matter where He leads us, no matter what circumstances we face, He is in control. Oh, that we may understand the authority of Christ and the power at our disposal! Eph. 1:15-23; Col. 1:29

“Go ye therefore,” – Switch the words around...read it this way, “Therefore, go ye” What is “therefore” connecting? Jesus’ God-given authority in heaven and earth and “Go ye”! Most literal translations of this phrase show that it is not necessarily a command but more of an understood action. Here is a possible better understanding of this thought----“Therefore having gone”; “while you are going” It changes the thought from a command to an understood action. We are already going and moving through life, we are not commanded to go, we are going already. And as we go on this journey and pilgrimage of life....make disciples!

“teach all nations,” – Gk – disciple all people groups; here the converting influence of the gospel is highlighted. **This is the only command of the Great Commission!** This is the world-wide mission! It is not just a challenge to be missionary-minded but missionary active! Jesus did not send the disciples only to Israel but to the world. The Jews rejected Jesus as the Messiah, yet He offered salvation not only to the Jewish people but to all those who would believe on Him. (John 1:11-13) Remember, Jesus died for the sins of the world, so the mission is to the world. John 1:29; 3:16; I John 2:2; 2 Peter 3:9 In Acts the early church made disciples as they went! Acts 11:19-21 This work is from individual to individual.

“baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” – Jesus is introducing a new baptism to the disciples. He had told His disciples to make disciples of all the nations, but now He switches to

those new individual converts when using the phrase “baptizing them”. That thought is an emphasis on the individual! The Jewish baptism that John the Baptist used was symbolic of a heart of repentance. This new baptism was a baptism demonstrating a heart of belief in the work of Christ on the cross. The original languages in both the Old and New Testaments always pointed to an immersion or dipping into the water. This is the consistent Biblical form of baptism. Jesus is instigating a baptism that acknowledges the Trinity and calls us to baptize in this fashion. The phrase used here of “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” is called the clearest Trinitarian formula anywhere in the Gospels! Believer’s baptism – Rom. 6:4

“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved;” – This is a part of Mark 16:16. This is a verse people believing in baptismal regeneration or salvation based on baptism uses to support their theology. But you cannot build your theology on mere phrases. As we look at the next thought, “but he that believeth not shall be damned.” We see the real foundation to eternal life...“believeth”. When this verse is taken within its context it is clear salvation is based on faith in the work of Christ on the cross. One doesn’t have to go far in the Scriptures to prove a believeth plus baptism salvation wrong. The thief on the cross is a wonderful example that baptism does not save! If the world does not receive the Word of God concerning His Son, they cannot expect any other way of salvation; they will perish!

“Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you:” – The disciple-making does not end with conversion! The Great Commission is a long-term act of not only making disciples but also seeing them grow in their knowledge of Christ to the point of their ability to successfully continue the commission! This growth is done by learning about Jesus and His words and it is an incompletable, life-long task! Craig Blomberg in his commentary on Matthew says, “Teaching obedience to all of Jesus’ commands forms the heart of disciple making.” p. 433 Dr. Blomberg goes on and says something I have considered often during these 10 years of studying Jesus.

*“Jesus’ words further demonstrate that Christian ethics and morality should first of all focus on Jesus’ teaching, even though the Old Testament still remains relevant, as one sees how it is fulfilled in Christ (Matt. 5:17-20), and even though the rest of the New Testament remains relevant as further explanation of the significance of Christ and his teachings. But 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.” Dr. Craig Blomberg The New American Commentary – Matthew pg. 433*

“And these signs shall follow them” – This list of signs and even other miracles done by the apostles in the early days of the church helped to authenticate that God was part of their ministry and message. They were an authenticating tool to help win the first century skeptic to Christ! In Matt. 10:1 when the disciples went on a preaching tour, they had many signs given to them! These became the divine credentials to their ministry during the book of Acts – Acts 3:6. In the early days of the church gift signs are given to the apostles. (2 Cor. 12:12) These were gone by the end of the first century, at the completion of the New Testament. The power of the Holy Spirit working through the Word of God is much more efficient than miracles! By the way, all the miracles mentioned in this verse are recorded in Acts or the Epistles except the “drink any deadly thing.”

“and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.” – Jesus ends this great commission with this, “and, lo.” I spent time and went through all the English translations to see how they fall with the interpretation

of these two words. The count is this: “and, lo,” – 15 times; “Behold” – 11 times; “Remember/never forget” – 17 times; “Look” – 2 times; “You can be sure/surely” – 8 times I think we can take away from these various thoughts a combination of thoughts into one! “Look here closely, this is a wonderful thought I don’t want you to forget, you can be sure, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.” This is really Christ’s mission! We are His servants; we are going in His authority and His power. Jesus will always be with His servants to the very end! Success is guaranteed! His power and presence are with His servants as they perform this commission. Matt. 1:23; John 14:16-20; 15:4; Heb. 13:5 “We are not all evangelists, but we have all received gifts that we can use in helping to fulfill the Great Commission. As we obey, we have comfort in the knowledge that Jesus is always with us.” Life Application p. 1636

“Amen” – When reading a Red-Letter edition of the New Testament, this word at the end of Matthew is not part of Jesus’ commission so therefore not red. This word was written by Matthew, it was his fitting end to his gospel. Matthew ends focusing on Jesus’ attributes rather than the disciples’ responsibilities and ends it, “Amen – so be it!”

### **Believer’s Application:**

In my Bible under the last verses of Matthew 28 is a half empty page. Years ago, I wrote these words there:

The Great Commission is sandwiched between two wonderful statements:

*I’m in CONTROL with all AUTHORITY!*

*Make Disciples*

*I’m with you ALWAYS!*

Paul had this confidence from Jesus himself in Acts 18:1-11. Let’s have these words always before us as we open our mouths and give the Gospel of Jesus Christ. “Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city.” Over three hundred times the New Testament uses the word “much” and it always meant a very large number! Let us also go with assurance and fulfil our part of the Great Commission remembering...Jesus is in Control with all Authority! Christ is always with us! and then make Disciples teaching them the wonderful commands of Jesus!

All post-resurrection commissions: Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-18; Luke 24:47-49; John 20:21; 21:15-17; Acts 1:4-8