

# No promises. Just facts.

## Matthew 28:16-20

### INTRODUCTION

While I was waiting on my grandson to finish his cello lesson a few weeks ago, I happened across a travel planning website. It was touting mountain vacations. It was a very creative piece of writing and marketing.

- Their #1 reason for taking a mountain vacation was "weight loss." Here's what they said:

At higher elevations, the air contains less oxygen than at sea level. This means your body has to work harder to perform even basic tasks like walking, climbing, and staying warm. Because of this extra effort, your body uses more energy than it usually does during a normal day in the city... Over time, this can help with weight control ... (10 Major Reasons to Travel to the Mountains)

I have no idea if the science actually supports this theory, but it is great marketing! If you are headed to the mountains this summer, please report back!

Our Gospel text today takes us to the mountains. Jesus loved the mountains. Many of the stories of the Scriptures happen on the mountains.

- The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7)
- The Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17)
- When Jesus was making the final decision about who would be His 12 disciples, He went up on a mountain to pray. (Luke 6:12)
- When He heard the bad news about the beheading of John the Baptist (Mark 6)

Some 20 different times are recorded in the Gospels. Sometimes He went alone to pray; other times He took people with Him.

Some Bible scholars think this "mountain meeting" in Galilee was the occasion on which Jesus appeared "more than 500 brethren at one time," as recorded in 1 Corinthians 15:6.

After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. (1 Corinthians 15:6)

Our text today includes the detail that some of those present were doubters about the resurrection. Easter Sunday night had eliminated any doubt from the Eleven, so the thought is this had to have been a bigger crowd.

When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. (Matthew 28:17)

I tend to agree with that perspective, which means that I don't understand this passage to be Matthew's version of the Ascension. This was simply another one of those appearances in which Jesus reassured His followers and helped shape their understanding of what was supposed to happen when He went back into heaven.

Usually when we look at this "Great Commission" our eyes focus on the section that says:

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. (Matthew 28:19-20a)

But today I want to focus on two other statements. They function as bookends to the Great Commission. Let's call them promises ... one at the beginning of the "Great Commission" and the other at the end.

### **PROMISE #1: A PROMISE OF POWER**

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. (Matthew 28:18)

Depending on the translation you are using verse 18 reads either "all power" or "all authority."

It is a different word than in Acts 1:8. There the word is "dunamis" (dynamite), denoting physical power. Here the word is "exousia" (authority), denoting the power of the one who rules the land.

This is the authority that gives us the right to things in the name of Jesus.

- When you pray, you do so in the name and by the authority of Jesus.
- When you grant someone forgiveness, you do so in the name and by the authority of Jesus.
- When you come face to face with the forces of evil, you do so in the name and by the authority of Jesus.
- When you make disciples, you do so in the name and by the authority of Jesus.

When Jesus rose from the dead, he conquered sin and the grave, and claimed back all of creation from the devil. Jesus now has ALL authority.

Since He has all authority, we may obey Him without fear. No matter where He leads us, no matter what circumstances we face, He is in control. By His death and resurrection, Jesus defeated all enemies and won for Himself all authority.

Christianity is a missionary faith. The very nature of God demands this, for God is love and God is not willing that any should perish (2 Peter 3:9). Our Lord's death on the cross was for the whole world.

- If we are the children of God and share His nature, then we will want to tell the good news to the lost world.

When we read the Book of Acts, we see that the early church operated on the basis of the Lord's sovereign authority. They ministered in His name. They depended on His power and guidance. They did not face a lost world on the basis of their own authority, but on the authority of Jesus Christ.

## **PROMISE #2: A PROMISE OF PRESENCE (v. 20b)**

And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. (Matthew 28:20)

Matthew 18:20 tells us that whenever two or three gather together, Jesus is "in the midst" of them. But here He lets us know He is with us always – meaning, even when we are at work fulfilling the Great Commission. Had He remained on earth, Jesus could not have fulfilled this promise. It was when the Spirit came that Jesus could be with His people no matter where they were.

We love that promise, don't we? Knowing that Jesus is with us when times are tough is something we cling to! But "always" also means when we are sharing our faith!

Several mornings a week I encounter one of my kids' former teachers at Panera. He grew up in the Catholic School system where the nuns always ended the school day by telling the students "God be with you."

- As he left one morning, he told me "Goodbye," and went to his car. Seconds later he came back in again to tell me his Catholic guilt had kicked in and he should have said: "God be with you." We laughed, and he went on his way.
- The next time I saw him, he had some exciting news to share with me. He started the conversation by saying "You're a pastor. You should know this."
- He had looked up the derivation of the word "goodbye" and discovered that it is a shortened form of what those nuns had told him every day. "Goodbye" means "God be with you."
- He thought it was wild that all these non-Christians were constantly telling each other "goodbye" without knowing that they were praying for God's presence on each other.

So whether we are together at church or alone by ourselves, let's be reminded that God is with us. That's what the text says, right:

And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. (Matthew 28:20)

## **APPLICATION**

I've always thought about these as bookend promises to the Great Commission. On the front end, the promise of power. On the back end, the promise of His presence. I like how that feels.

In essence Jesus says to those gathered that day:

Here's what I want you to do ... I have the authority to make it happen and I'll be with you as you do it.

Dr. G. Campbell Morgan was a famous evangelist and Bible scholar in the early 1900s. He wrote about an experience he had early in his ministry. Morgan used to visit a ladies' retirement home once a week to read the Bible to them. When he came to the end of Matthew's Gospel, Morgan read this passage to them, and said "Aren't those wonderful promises?" One of the ladies quickly replied, "Young man, those are not promises. They are facts!"

Indeed they are.

Amen