

The Mission of the Church
Matthew 28:16-20
Part three

From time to time in the course of our lives there are what I call “teachable moments.” I believe we are in the midst of one of those moments now.

If you have been reading newspapers, listening to radio or watching television I am sure that you are well aware of the debate that has been stirred up by Proposition 8. And what is Proposition 8?

Proposition 8 is a proposed state constitutional amendment that will appear on our November ballot designed to overturn the practice of granting marriage licenses to same sex couples in the State of California.

Since Proposition 8 reflects the biblical and traditional definition of marriage we might think that it would have a very good chance of passing, but this is not the case at all. In fact, it would appear that there is a good chance that Proposition 8 will not pass.

So the question that we must ask ourselves as a church is this: Lord, in light of the possible defeat of Proposition 8, how would you have us to respond?

Understanding how the church should respond to the prospect of Proposition 8 not passing, based on what the Scriptures teach, requires that we know three different things.

My hope over the course of this study is that, after we consider these three things, we will not only understand how the church should respond, but that we will respond.

So, what was the first thing that I shared with you that we need to know? The church needs to know the real problem that we are facing in respect to the world.

Some might think that the real problem that we are facing in respect to the world is the possible defeat of Proposition 8, but this is not the real problem at all. It is only a symptom of the real problem.

The real problem facing the church today is that the world is spiritually dead and under the control of Satan (Ephesians 2:1-2). This is the real problem.

Let me read for you **Ephesians 2:1-2** and see if this is not so. **“And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, (2) in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.”** So, what is the real problem facing the church today?

The world, apart from Christ, is spiritually dead and under the control of Satan. This is the real problem facing the church and it is this problem that I believe best explains the growing opposition to Proposition 8 and its possible defeat.

So if this is true, then how should we respond? Should we seek to mobilize churches to drum up support for Proposition 8 among those who are spiritually dead and under the control of Satan? I know that to some, perhaps in their desperation, that this might seem appealing. But I believe it should be quite obvious to us that those efforts will over time prove unproductive.

But it is even worse than that. I believe that seeking to mobilize our churches to rally support for Proposition 8 among the spiritually dead and those under the control of Satan will not only prove over time to be unproductive, but will over time prove even to be counter-productive.

This thought leads us to the second thing we need to know if we are going to understand how God would have us to respond to the very real possibility that Proposition 8 may not pass. So what is this second thing we need to know?

The second thing we need to know is this: We need to know God’s solution in respect to the problem that we are facing in this world. And what is God’s solution for the problem that we are facing in this world?

God’s solution for the world’s spiritual deadness and satanic control is the gospel of Christ (Romans 1:16).

Let me read for you **Romans 1:16**. **“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the**

Jew first and also to the Greek.” So what is God’s solution? The gospel of Christ is God’s solution, and apart from the gospel there is no other solution. In other words, when we see the growing opposition to Proposition 8 and the growing possibility of its defeat, and begin to consider how the Lord would have us to respond, we should anticipate that ultimately the answer that God would give us on how we should respond would certainly include the word “gospel.”

And what is the gospel of Christ? This is the gospel: “that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). This is the gospel and this is God’s solution to the problem that we are now facing in this world, for it is this message and this message alone that is able to deliver the spiritually dead and the spiritually enslaved. But someone might say, “I agree with that, but why can’t we also seek to rally support for Proposition 8 anyway?”

Let me ask you this question. Would gays becoming straight save them? No! Would gays choosing not to live a homosexual lifestyle save them? No! Would gays living a homosexual lifestyle but not choosing to live together save them? No! Would gays living together in a homosexual lifestyle, but not being able to get married in the state of California save them? No! None of these things can save them.

So if this is true, then what good does it do for us to focus our attention upon changing their behavior apart from the gospel? It will only irritate them, believing it is none of our business, or confuse them in respect to the true message of the church, the gospel of Christ. And of course either of these responses would be counter-productive to the gospel message.

Do we have a problem in respect to the world in which we are living? Yes, we have a problem, but it is not the possible defeat of Proposition 8. The real problem is that people are spiritually dead and under the control of Satan. And what is God’s solution for that problem? There is only one solution and that is the gospel and therefore it should not be surprising that the right response to the possibility of Proposition 8 not passing involves the gospel.

This brings us to the third thing we need to know if we are going to be able to understand how we should respond to the present prospect of Proposition

8 not passing. Not only do we need to know the real problem that we are in fact facing in this world, not only do we need to know God's solution, but we also need to know this:

We need to know why we are here. Let me ask you this question. When we, as spiritual zombies by the grace of God came to the place that we wanted to be set free from sin and Satan's control, and when we by the grace of God and through the faith He provided stepped through the door that Christ opened in order to enter into a personal relationship with the God of this universe, why weren't we immediately taken into heaven? The answer is quite simple. He wanted us to do something in this world that we could only do if we remained in this world. So, what was this thing that He wanted us to do?

Let me read for you **Matthew 28:16-20** which records for us what is commonly referred to as the "Great Commission." **"But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated. (17) When they saw Him, they worshipped Him; but some were doubtful. (18) And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. (19) Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, (20) teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even, to the end of the age.'"** So why are we here? Why weren't we immediately taken to heaven when we by faith stepped through the door that Christ opened?"

There is only one reason why we are here. We are here to make disciples (Matthew 28:19). We know this because the verb "make disciples" grammatically in Christ's instructions to His disciples in **verses 19-20** is the main verb. This is why we are here.

The verb "make disciples" is an imperative command from the verb MATHETEUEO from which we get the noun "disciple" or "learner.

So, what are we to do? What is our work? We are to make disciples. In other words, we are to make learners out of the spiritually dead.

So how does this process begin? It begins with the gospel. There is no other way for this work to begin other than through the gospel. But once the

gospel penetrates the heart of someone who is spiritually dead, and he or she become spiritually alive and freed from Satan's control, this does not mean that our work of disciple making has somehow come to an end in respect to that person. No! It has not come to an end. In fact, it has only begun. This is something we will see more clearly as we look more carefully at **Matthew 28:19-20**.

But for right now, all I want us to see and to focus on is this. We have been left in this world for only one reason. And what is that one reason? We have been left in this world to make disciples.

And when we see the direction that this world is going and are reminded that this world is in fact spiritually dead and under the control of Satan, such as we are now seeing in the growing support of same-sex unions and the growing opposition to Proposition 8, how would the Lord have us to respond? By passing out petitions, promoting more legislation, mobilizing churches to drum up support amongst the spiritual zombies of this world? No! There is only one only good viable response and that is to become even more committed to the work of making disciples.

So where do we begin in respect to this work? Do we begin by focusing on the attitude of an effective disciple maker or on the actions of an effective disciple maker? It begins, of course, with our attitude.

Therefore, if we are going to be effective disciple makers, we must be characterized by the right attitude (Matthew 28:16-17). And what is that attitude? Let me read for you **Matthew 28:16-17**. **“But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated. (17) When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some were doubtful.”** Within these two verses the attitude of an effective disciple maker is clearly evident.

So, what is the right attitude that must characterize an effective disciple maker? Those who want to be effective disciple makers must be wholeheartedly available to Christ. And isn't this exactly what we see in **Matthew 28:16-17**? Let us take a look at these two verses and see if this is not so.

Let us begin with the very first few words of **verse 16**. **“But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain Jesus had designated.”**

Why were these eleven disciples preceding to Galilee? The eleven disciples came to Galilee because Christ, after His resurrection, had instructed His “brethren” through certain women to go there (Matthew 28:10). This is made clear to us in **Matthew 28:10**.

But obviously it was not just the eleven who were invited to go to Galilee to the specific mountain that Christ had designated. It was in fact an open invitation to all of His followers. Why would I say this? I would say this in light of how many of His followers, it would appear, actually came. And how many was that?

It appears from 1 Corinthians 15:6 that there were in addition to Christ’s eleven disciples approximately 500 other followers who made their way to Galilee in order to see the risen Christ.

And what was true of each of these 500 that had chosen to assemble in Galilee? Every one of them had made themselves available. Everyone of them were not only willing to adjust their schedules, but were willing to pay the price of getting their in terms of time, energy and resources.

But it wasn’t just availability that we see in this passage, it was wholehearted availability. And where do we see this in these verses? We see it in their response to Christ in **Matthew 28:17**.

So now let us now read **Matthew 28:17** and see if this is not so. **“When they saw Him, they worshiped Him.”**

When those who came to Galilee saw that Christ had risen, they worshiped Him. In other words, they knelt or prostrated themselves before Christ, recognizing Him as their living Lord.

So let me ask you a question. Did everyone immediately to this. No! Certainly the eleven did and I am certain that many of the others who were there did as well. But it would appear that there were some that were not quite as quick to kneel or to prostrate themselves before Christ. Why would I say this?

Let us continue to read **Matthew 28:17**. “**But some doubted.**” So, what exactly does this mean?

When Matthew 28:17 tells us that some of them doubted, it simply meant that when Christ first appeared that some of them were not in a position to know for certain that it was in fact Christ. This is all that it means.

Is there anything in the text that might indicate to us that this initial uncertainty might have changed? Absolutely! Look at **Matthew 28:18** and what does it say? “**And Jesus came up and spoke to them.**” In other words, Christ got closer to those who had gathered. And what would have been the result of this? The result, I believe, would be pretty obvious.

Any doubt that might have existed in the minds of those who came to the mountain in Galilee would have been removed after Christ came up and spoke to them in Matthew 28:18. And I would have to believe that this would have included all 500 of them.

And once all doubt had been removed and they all were either kneeling or were prostrated before Christ their risen Lord, what do you think their attitude would have been? Let me tell you what their attitude would have been. They would have been wholeheartedly available to Christ to do exactly what He wanted them to do. And what was that? He wanted them to make disciples.

Are we also wholeheartedly available? Are we in our homes, in our workplaces, in our schools, in our neighborhoods wholeheartedly available to do the work that He has called us to do? Are we wholeheartedly available for the work of making disciples? We need to be. The world needs us to be.

Are you here this morning ready to make yourself wholeheartedly available for this great work? Hopefully your answer is yes. And if it is, then I would encourage you to come back next week and see what is required of you in the performance of this specific work.

May God give us the grace to wholeheartedly commit ourselves to the work of making disciples.