*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

May 17 - 22

The Great Commission

**Monday, May 17 Matthew 4:18-22**

*“Come, follow me”*

Jesus’ strategy was to develop a disciple community, to call a group of associates who would be with him and learn from him. A disciple is one who both identifies with and learns from his master. Jesus began by calling two brothers, Peter and Andrew, saying to them, “Follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people.” He was moving these men from their occupation as fishermen to recognize the vocation to be disciples, heralds of the good news. It is impressive that “they immediately left their nets and followed him.” Jesus next called another set of brothers, James and John, from their occupation of fishing, asking them likewise to follow him.

These four make up the inner circle of Jesus’ larger group of disciples. They were average men, neither the bravest nor the easiest to work with. Peter was impulsive and headstrong, Andrew was homespun and supportive, and James and John were ambitious and called “sons of thunder.” Still, they were willing to change, to identify with Christ and become messengers of the Kingdom of God.

*To fish for people, Lord, is to invite others to become fellow-disciples. Amen.*

**Tuesday, May 18 Matthew 9:9-13**

*“Matthew got up and followed him”*

Matthew was at work in his tax collector’s booth when Jesus said to him: “Follow me and be my disciple.” He arose and followed Jesus. Having decided to become a follower of Jesus, Matthew declared his choice openly by inviting his friends to his home for a dinner with Jesus. These friends are referred to as publicans (tax collectors) and sinners (persons careless about keeping the laws), and are set in contrast with the Pharisees who were the legalists of Jesus’ day.

Jesus demonstrated love and acceptance by his willingness to sit down with sinners and associate with them. This is friendship evangelism, for we cannot bring others to the Lord if we keep ourselves aloof from them. When the Pharisees questioned Jesus’ association with sinners, he answered that he had come to save sinners. His mission opens the door to all, “For all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). He also challenged the Pharisees with Scripture, noting from Hosea 6:6 that God desires mercy rather than sacrifices, a forgiving spirit more than legal demands or religious rites.

*I know I am a sinner, Lord, and that you have called and forgiven me. Amen.*

**Wednesday, May 19 Matthew 9:35 – 10:5a**

*“Jesus sent out the twelve apostles”*

Seeing the crowds as sheep without a shepherd, Jesus displays the compassion of the Shepherd. He is moved by the suffering and bewilderment of the people, and by the weariness of those trying to find peace with God through a maze of religious requirements. He also uses the picture of the harvest, saying the harvest is great (“see all the people needing to be brought into the Kingdom of God”) but the laborers are few (“but we are short of people who will tell them about God’s Kingdom”). The admonition is to pray that God will send out laborers into his harvest.

The prayer for God to send workers is followed immediately by Jesus calling and sending the twelve. Prayer conditions us to the will of God, and God often uses us to help answer our own prayers. Jesus created the twelve as a body of followers with authority to do great things in his name. Later called the church, “the body of Christ,” those who faithfully follow Jesus are the visible expression of his saving ministry on earth.

*I am available to work in the harvest, Lord, sharing about you with others. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

May 17 - 22

The Great Commission

**Thursday, May 20 Matthew 16:13-20**

*“Who do you say I am?”*

Caesarea Philippi is a northern border town where the people of Israel met the people of the Gentile world, and a site of the worship of the idol Pan. In this unique setting, Jesus asked the question of his disciples, “Who do people say that I, the Son of Man, am?” Their answer associated Jesus with three great voices of salvation history: John the Baptist, the herald of a new age; Jeremiah, the prophet of reform and hope; and Elijah, the prophet of power and miracles. But none of these witnesses of the past answered the question of the uniqueness of Jesus and his presence among them.

Jesus then asked the disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter gave the answer for himself and for all of the disciples, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus makes it clear that this insight was not of human origin but by a disclosure from God. Jesus goes on to introduce a new element, the church. This is the first use of the word “church” in the New Testament. This word, *ekklesia*, refers to an assembly of citizens who come together regularly.

*I profess, Lord, that you are the Christ, the Son of the living God. Amen.*

**Friday, May 21 Matthew 20:20-28**

*“The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve”*

The request for position exposes the nature of selfish ambition. The disciples’ interest is on status and power, not on empathy and participation in the suffering of Christ which he had just discussed. The cup of suffering and the baptism of martyrdom are referred to in the response of Jesus. To share his mission is to share its cost. With limited understanding they said, “We are able.” Jesus did not rebuke them for their presumption, but predicted that they would share martyrdom for the will and work of God.

Jesus contrasts the approach of rulers among Gentiles with the way for disciples of Christ. He emphasizes the point by an interpretation of his own mission. To be truly great is to serve. To be in first place in the work of God is to become a servant for the enrichment of others. Thus, like Christ, we are to serve others. However, when the “other” one is serving is a peer or colleague, such service becomes more difficult when the “other” is seen as a potential competitor, something the disciples seem to be doing.

*To serve others, Lord, is to become like you. Amen.*

**Saturday, May 22 Matthew 28:16-20**

*“Go, and make disciples”*

Jesus’ statement “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth” is a declaration of the ultimate victory of Christ. He is now the recipient of God’s investiture of authority, that “in all things he may have the primacy” (Colossians 1:18). For this reason, his followers are to go and encourage others to also become his followers, his disciples, so that they may give Jesus the primary place of authority in their lives.

As they go, making disciples, they are to baptize and teach them. Baptism in the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit signifies that a person is in direct relation with God as he has revealed himself to be. The commission to teach relates the disciple directly to the content of Jesus’ ministry. To live in relationship to Jesus as our Lord and Savior is to commit to being obedient to all the commands he has given us. Matthew concludes his book with a most remarkable promise that Jesus will be with his disciples until the end of the age, that is, until we are resurrected and see him “face to face.”

*I belong to you, Lord, and nothing can separate me from you. Amen.*