



# EXPOSITION

Monthly e-Bulletin from Virginia Beach Theological Seminary



## From My Window

This semester it has been my joy to teach the Gospel of Matthew. This Gospel includes six sermons of Jesus found no other place in the world! Jesus' sermon in Chapter 18 has caught my attention, and my mind cannot seem to move from its content. In the opening verse the disciples ask, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" What the disciples were asking was who among them was "the most valuable player." Jesus placed a child before them and said, "Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest." I am sure this is not what the disciples expected. Jesus' point is not that children are innocent or selfless, but that they have no status in society. Jesus is clear: disciples are not to seek status or fame, but "to walk humbly before their God" (Micah 6:8).



After graduating from the University of Northern Colorado in 1992, God led Michael into business as the Sales and Marketing Manager of a major firm. Through a number of circumstances, God brought Michael and Julie to Virginia Beach where they became burdened for full-time ministry. Preparation for life-ministry in Cambodia was far from easy — Michael pursued an MDiv at VBTS while flying almost weekly on business trips and raising four daughters. He was an outstanding student who taught himself elementary Greek and Hebrew and then passed both entrance exams! After graduating from VBTS in 2008, God opened the door for Michael and Julie to minister in Pursat, Cambodia where Michael serves as pastor of a young church. Though they live in a small flat of 386 sq. ft. and have few luxuries compared to former days, he writes: "My greatest aspiration is to see Cambodian hearts behold the glory of Christ." God bless you, Michael and Julie, for being slaves of Jesus in Cambodia!



## Truth for the Agora: Jesus' Last Words (*Matthew 28:18-20*)

**It has been reported** that as Alfred Hitchcock lay on his death bed, he said, "One never knows the ending." This striking statement causes my thoughts to quickly turn to the final chapter of Matthew. The seeming catastrophe of Jesus' crucifixion on Golgotha's hill in the previous chapter (27:45-61) gives way to his ultimate triumph in Galilee (28:16-20). What Jesus had predicted before his death (26:32) was now taking place, "just as he said" (28:6). However, for Matthew, Jesus' resurrection is not the end of the story; rather, this belongs to his divine commission. Jesus' words to his handpicked disciples are expressions of triumph and hope, not despair and uncertainty. Let's review three encouraging ideas from Jesus' last words recorded in Matthew.

**First, Jesus dispelled personal doubt and pronounced his universal Lordship (v.16-18).** As a participant in the Galilean reunion, Matthew records that there was a mixture of uncertainty and worship among the disciples as they initially met with the risen Lord. Yet the first conversation that Matthew recorded included Jesus' emphatic statement: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me!" His words were a reflection of the OT prophet Daniel who prophesied that the Son of Man would receive "dominion and glory" and that "all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him" (7:14). As one commentator properly noted, the glory of Jesus seen on the Mount of Transfiguration (17:1-3) "has become the permanent mode of Jesus' life as the exalted Son of Man" (Turner, 689). Now, as Lord of the universe, the disciples' doubts vanished, and they were prepared to embrace his personal commission for their lives.

**Second, Jesus directed his universal mission to make disciples of all nations (v. 19-20a).** In direct contrast to his earlier Mission Sermon (10:5-7), he commands his Eleven to "make disciples of all nations." Because of these words, "Christianity essentially [became] a missionary religion" (Broadus, 593). At the core of Jesus' command is discipleship. When Matthew penned these final words, he probably had his own experience in mind when Jesus surprisingly called him to discipleship (9:9). Matthew understood Jesus' meaning, and according to Luke's description, "leaving everything, he rose and followed him" (5:28). This is exactly Jesus' expectation for all disciples who will follow him. In other words, Matthew's call was not unique and something only for the zealots. The command for *everyone* who follows Jesus is to "deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me" (16:24). When one is ready to *exclusively follow Jesus*, he or she is ready to be publicly marked by baptism, and fully embrace the discipleship duties which Jesus expressed. Jesus' directive is penetrating, for it calls people of all nations to forsake everything for him.

**Third, Jesus concludes with a promise of his universal presence (v. 20b).** Matthew ends his Gospel with what Israel's leaders feared most – the continued presence of Jesus in this world. "In OT commissioning scenes the assurance of God's presence was to empower his often inadequate servants to fulfill the task he had called them to" (France, 1119). Here Jesus promises, "I will be with you," which echoes the opening words of Matthew's Gospel: Jesus is "Immanuel, which means, God with us" (1:23). In John's Gospel he said, "I will not leave you orphans" (14:18). Though Jesus will not be seen with the human eye, his presence will be manifest through his disciples, and felt around the world until "the end of the age." This is why Jesus' last words are expressions of triumph, not despair.

**I began this short essay with the fearful words of a dying man,** "One never knows the ending." Sadly, these words reflect a life invested in shallow, temporal things. What a stark contrast with those who are disciples of the risen Christ! We who follow Jesus have his presence within us, and are motivated by his final instructions to us. His words carefully chart our life's purpose - from beginning to end! So, are we following Jesus - exclusively?