

Last Words

I can hardly believe that we have come to our final week of homework! Last week we followed the women to the garden tomb and were met by angels proclaiming that Jesus had risen, just as he said he would! We stood by with Mary weeping over the loss of her Lord only to be given the gift of seeing the risen Lord first among all the disciples, and given the mission to go tell them what she had seen. And then we joined two disciples on the road to Emmaus accompanied by none other than the Lord himself explaining all that He had fulfilled in the scriptures pointing to the Messiah of God. What wonders and glories we witnessed last week and they will continue this week, too!

This week we will join the disciples in Jerusalem as Jesus appears to all, and especially Thomas. Then we will travel up to Galilee where Jesus continues to teach and encourage his disciples in preparation for the work they will be doing to further the Kingdom. In our final lesson this week we will stand in awe as we watch Jesus return to our Father again.

Jesus Appears to the Disciples

*Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"
(John 20:19)*

Our first homework segment this week will focus on Jesus appearing to the disciples he loves so much. These are tender scenes where Jesus strengthens and restores the faith of his followers. The disciples have come together on the evening of Jesus resurrection in fear, grief, and in need of consolation. They had heard the stories of Jesus appearing to the women, but had decided their words were nonsense (Luke 24:11). How could anyone come back from the gruesome, agonizing death on a cross that Jesus had died? Before beginning your study today, take a few minutes to prepare your heart and mind for the Word of God.



Our scripture passage today focuses on Jesus appearing to the disciples on two occasions. Read John 20:19-31.

When were disciples assembled together and why were the doors locked?

Why did Jesus show the disciples his hands and his side?

What was their response?

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 In verse 21 Jesus says, *"As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."* Where is Jesus sending them?

In verse 22 Jesus breathes on them and says *"Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven"*. What does this mean?

When did Jesus appear to the gathered disciples the second time?

Who was not present at the initial appearance in the locked room?

What did Thomas say in response the other disciples telling him they had seen the risen Lord?

When Jesus appeared in the room again with Thomas and the other disciples what did he do and say?

In John 20: 29 Jesus says to Thomas, *"Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."* Do you think Jesus is rebuking him, or is he pointing to a future time when all who will come to faith in him will do so by the testimony of eyewitnesses?

On this evening of the first day of the week, the day Jesus rose from the dead, the disciples were still gripped with fear. They had locked themselves in a room in fear of the religious leaders coming to arrest them. They had just witnessed the gruesome crucifixion of their messiah and they feared the same fate awaited them. The darkness of the evening parallels the darkness of the fear and lack of faith consuming the disciples. Jesus' sudden appearance and his words, *"Peace be with you!"* dissipates the dark fear of the disciples.

Just as he had commissioned Mary Magdalene with a new mission (of testifying to the truth of Jesus' resurrection) he recommissions the disciples to take up their role in continuing with the work he started during his ministry. Just as he had previously prepared them and sent them out to preach, teach, and do miraculous signs, this time he prepares them with spiritual power. He anoints them with the Holy Spirit and sends them out to tell the good news of the Kingdom of Heaven and the resurrection. In fact the resurrection of Jesus becomes a primary focus in leading others to the kingdom of God as the new church spreads through the Roman world as detailed in the book of Acts.

In proclaiming that the disciples, now apostles, (and by extension into the future, the Church) had the authority to forgive sins he was establishing the fact that the church would be

able to impart the *way* to forgiveness and salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. If one believes the promises of Jesus, a Christian can *announce* the forgiveness of his sins. If he rejects the gospel, a Christian has the authority to announce that his sins are not forgiven. Note that only God can forgive sins, but authority to announce that God has or has not forgiven sins is given to the Church. Christians involved in the forgiveness of sins do so as *agents* of the Holy Spirit. With the resurrection of Jesus the people of God have entered into a new era of faith. It is called the Church Age. The Old Covenant has been superseded by the New Covenant, and the Kingdom of God has been opened to all who would choose to enter. As we await the return of Jesus we are all called to go out and share the gospel, the good news that the Kingdom of God has come, sins are forgiven, and that Jesus lives and reigns.

In his gospel John focuses on providing eyewitness testimony so that one can come to know that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Certainly the disciples were blessed to have lived and followed Jesus through his ministry and benefited from personal teaching, yet even being an eyewitness to the teachings and miracles of Jesus did not guarantee faith. The vast majority of those who have come to believe in Jesus as their savior have done so on the testimony of the disciples and apostles, not firsthand experience. There were many firsthand witnesses of Jesus' miraculous works who never came to faith; consider the reactions of the Pharisees, the Sanhedrin, and the people of Israel in the time of Jesus as we have examined throughout our study. Jesus' words to Thomas in verse 29, point to the fact that faith is not a matter of *seeing* the Truth, but of *choosing* to believe it. The purpose of John's gospel, as well as those of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, was to provide the testimony that would lead one to choose to believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, the Son of God.

Tend My Flock

Jesus had appeared to the disciples twice before to encourage and strengthen their faith and to reveal that he had indeed risen from the dead just as he had promised. Surely the disciples were still reeling from the events of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and subsequent arrest, crucifixion, and resurrection. They probably were very confused and uncertain as to their future. In preparation for today's scripture passage, take a few minutes to prepare your heart to receive God's Word and ask Jesus to bless you with understanding.



Read John 21:1-25 and answer the following questions.

Why do you think the disciples went back to fishing?

Read Luke 5:1-11. What are the similarities of these two scenes?

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Why do you think these scenes are almost identical?

In Matthew 28:7 an Angel had promised that Jesus would appear to them in Galilee. Why do you think Jesus wanted them to meet him in Galilee?

Jesus now turns to Peter, how many times does Jesus ask Peter if he loves him?

What is Jesus' response?

What does Jesus say to Peter at the end of verse 19?



What is the purpose of this event with Peter? Why does Jesus ask him repeatedly the same question?

The purpose of this passage seems likely to be of renewal. The seven disciples have returned to Galilee, their home. The last three years have taken them away from family and friends for long periods of time as they followed in the footsteps of Jesus. Where did Jesus lead them? The culmination of their discipleship was in Jerusalem. First the triumphal entry where no doubt they thought all of their hopes and dreams of Jesus being the David-like Messiah would come to pass. Instead they are thrown into fear and turmoil as Jesus is arrested, flogged, crucified, and then appears to them after his resurrection. They likely are at an utter loss as to what will happen next. Will Jesus appear again? If he does, for how long before he departs again? Will he return and lead them to a sovereign kingdom this time? What do they dare hope for?

So we find them on the Sea of Galilee¹ where they decide to go fishing. Why not? It is what they do; it is what their families have always done. Does this reflect a long term plan, perhaps not, but it is what they know. Our scene comes to parallel the original calling of several of the disciples in Luke 5:1-11. It is not an identical scene, but then again the circumstances are not identical. All the sheep had scattered when the shepherd was struck. All of the disciples, not just Peter, had deserted Jesus. Jesus comes and calls them back to ministry in his Kingdom. It's the dawn of a new day, and the dawning of a renewed ministry.

¹ Sea of Tiberius and Sea of Gennesaret are alternative names for the Sea of Galilee.

Then the gospel writer shifts our focus to Peter. Peter who had denied knowing and associating with Jesus must go through a process of coming to terms with his true feelings and his true desires. Does he truly want to be one of Jesus' disciples? Or has he lost heart and wants to return to the quiet life he once knew? Three times Jesus asks him if he loves him. The first question in verse 15 says "*Do you love me more than these?*" My personal belief is that Jesus is not comparing Peter's faith to the other disciples (Jesus has always made matters of faith individual and separate from others, even in this passage Jesus essentially tells Peter to mind his own business over John's future). I think the "these"² that Jesus is referring to is the fish. Jesus is asking Peter, "*Do you love me more than the life of fishing you once knew?*" The simple easy life of being a fisherman in contrast with the difficult, homeless, persecuted life of one of his disciples; where does your heart lie – with the life of a fisherman or the life of one my followers? Peter replies immediately, almost without thinking, "*Yes, Lord...you know I love you.*" Jesus isn't looking for the brash, false-bravado that led Peter once to proclaim his constancy even in the face of death to which he could not make good his claim. Jesus asks him a second time, "*...do you truly love me?*" to which Peter again replies "*Yes, Lord you know I love you.*" To both responses Jesus welcomes him with the instruction "*Feed my lambs...take care of my sheep.*" But it is still not enough. Jesus demands that Peter face up to his true self and reflect on the failings that caused him to stumble. A third time Jesus says to Peter, "*Simon son of John, do you love me?*" This time we see emotion cross Peter's response. The NIV says Peter was "hurt", the Greek word actually implies "grieves". Peter grieves over his failings, grieves over his denial of Jesus and again asserts his love for Jesus. Of this passage, the New American Commentary says: "Off-the-cuff replies and well-meaning superficial responses to the risen Lord will not work in the call of Jesus to the life of discipleship. Jesus forced Peter to learn the hard lesson of a changed life. Everyone who follows Jesus must learn what real believing and loving Jesus means." Jesus probes the wounded heart of Peter until Peter in truth can say and mean that it is Jesus he loves and Jesus whom he wants to follow. Jesus words sifted the motives of Peter's heart. When he was able to face what he found in his heart, only then could Jesus reinstate him in his position within the Eleven, and later his position as leader among the Apostles. Jesus does not bless Peter with position as a reward for a job well done, but because he knows that Peter will do the work set before him with a new and changed heart. The work set before Peter will have divine purpose in the world, it is not a reward handed out lightly. In fact Jesus goes on to tell Peter (rather cryptically) that his calling will lead to his death and crucifixion, but that it would glorify God and he would obediently follow Jesus to his death just as he had rashly and boldly asserted before his fall. Jesus words "*Follow me!*" is a command to rejoin the ranks of Jesus inner circle of devoted disciples and soon to be Apostles who will shoulder the burden of bringing the Kingdom of God to the world.

² In Greek the word translated "these" refers back to a masculine plural noun, "fish" or "ichthys" as used in verses 21:10 and 13 are masculine plural. The word "these" is ambiguous and could possibly refer to either the fish or the other disciples (obviously a masculine plural form of "these" would apply) gathered around for the repast. If Jesus was referring to the disciples, why is the word used "these" rather than "them"?

The Great Commission

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations..." (Matt 28:19)

Our passage of study today is one of Jesus' most important messages to the eleven disciples who would soon become known as Apostles. The word *apostle* comes from the Greek word "*apostolos*" which means, "a *delegate*; specially an *ambassador* of the Gospel; officially a *commissioner* of Christ [*apostle*]:- messenger, he that is sent."³ Jesus' words spoken to the Eleven carry a commission that reaches beyond his immediate circle of disciples to all the generations to come. His command in these verses changes the role of the disciples from being students to becoming teachers. His parting words are not directed just to his disciples, but to each one of us. As they are his last instructions to us, they carry great import and require serious consideration. Take time before commencing this passage of study to come before Jesus asking him to speak these instructions to you personally today.



Read Matthew 28:16-20 and answer the following questions.

Under whose authority are the disciples?



What does Jesus charge them to do?

- Why does Jesus tell them to baptize new believers? What does baptism signify?
- What are the disciples to teach? Luke 10:27 and Deuteronomy 6:4-5 sums up Jesus teaching in a nutshell. What do both passages say and why is it significant that Jesus' teaching in Luke is essentially the same as God's command in Deuteronomy?
- Acts 2:42 tells us what the Apostles and new believers did to fulfill Jesus command. What were they to teach and how did they go about it?

³ Strong's Talking Greek & Hebrew Dictionary

As the Eleven disciples go and make disciples, what becomes the responsibility of new disciples throughout the ages?

Jesus' words are a command, not a suggestion or recommendation. What does that mean to future generations of believers?

In what ways do you fulfill this command?

Who is with the disciples and until when?

When is the end of the age?

Jesus commission to the disciples reaches beyond just the immediate eleven gathered with him in Galilee. He tells them that based on the authority of all heaven and earth conferred upon him, he is sending them out to the nations in power to make disciples. The word "nations" is translated from the Greek "*ethnos*"⁴ which includes all peoples, Jew and Gentile alike. Upon Jesus' presentation at the temple as an infant, the prophet Simeon said, "...*my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel*" (Luke 2:30-32). What Simeon prophesied in Jesus' infancy was to come about through the diligent work of generations of disciples. Jesus' command is comprised of three imperatives: go, baptize, and teach. The disciples who had learned at the feet of Jesus all that Jesus had taught were stepping up to become the next generation of teachers. They were to *go* to all nations and peoples sharing the gospel. As recounted in the Book of Acts, that is exactly what the apostles did, they travelled all across the Roman Empire and beyond sharing the good news, the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

"Going" does not necessarily imply that all disciples must become missionaries to foreign lands in order to fulfill this command. While some do receive a special calling to such work, all Christians are called to "go" share the gospel with all in their realm of influence. Whether by word or action we *must* share the gospel of Jesus. We are to be an example through the way we live our lives modeled by Christ, and a voice through which God speaks to the hearts of all with whom we interact. If we do not share the Gospel by both word and deed we fail in our commission from Jesus as his disciples.

The second aspect of Jesus' commission to his disciples is to baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. As disciples our work of evangelizing leads others to come to know and accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior. He is the only means to entering into a relationship with God. Baptism is that outward sign of an inward choice to acknowledge Jesus as one's savior and the desire to model one's life after his teaching. Through baptism we identify ourselves with Jesus' death and resurrection – death to the old ways of our life and resurrection into new life in Christ. This sacrament publicly states our inclusion into the body of Christ, the fellowship of believers, and the inclusion into God's Covenant people.

The work of the disciple does not end with leading others to the point of baptism. Our work goes further with the teaching of new believers as they progress in their faith to mature Christians. New believers must be nurtured and counseled into the whole of God's revelation. The teaching, or exposition, of all of God's Word, even the most difficult of passages included in the Bible must be taught to believers before they too can fulfill Christ commission to "*go make*

⁴ Strong's Talking Greek & Hebrew Dictionary

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disciples" in the fullness of time. There must be a healthy balance of "outreach" (evangelism) and "inreach" (teaching obedience to Jesus' commands) within Church, each believer sharing his or her gift in those areas. All Christians are called to be both witnesses and disciplers.⁵

As we go and make disciples of the nations we are assured of his presence in our work. Jesus' last statement to the disciples (and to us) is *"And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age"* (Matthew 28:20). If Jesus is with us what more do we need in preserving Christian living and fulfilling his command? As we go forth proclaiming the Good News we have the assurance that Jesus is with us in the Holy Spirit. Just as the Apostle's went forth in power preaching the Good News and leading others to faith in Christ, we too can go forth in the power of the Holy Spirit. Upon our baptism we are sealed with the Holy Spirit. We rely on the teachings of the church and its modern day teachers and preachers to prepare us in knowing the commands of God. The Holy Spirit dwells in us and empowers us to do the work set before us in taking the gospel to the world around us. The power of the Holy Spirit that dwells in us gives us the courage, boldness, confidence, insight, ability, and authority⁶ needed to fulfill Jesus' command to go make disciples in his name. We do not need to fear failure for Christ is with us, until the end of the Age, until he comes again. Even in our weakest moments, Christ is faithful to us and to his Father in bringing about the Kingdom of God through our diligent service to him.

Not all Christians are called into foreign mission fields. In fact the fields of our own communities and neighborhoods are in need of truth, love, and forgiveness. Do you feel prepared to do as Jesus instructs?

Do you feel as if your church has done their part to teach and prepare you for such work? What can you do to fulfill this command of Christ?

Jesus Ascends into Heaven

We have reached the final scripture passage that we will examine together in this Bible study! You all have been such faithful companions as we have followed in Jesus footsteps. This is our last lesson together at his feet. Let us gather together once more and pray. *Lord Jesus, this dear woman and I come before you as we prepare to hear your parting words to us. We have been faithful disciples of your teaching. Bless us once more with wisdom and understanding as we finish our study together -Amen.*

Today we join Jesus and the disciples in the Book of Acts, also written by Luke as a companion to the Gospel he wrote.

⁵ New American Commentary: Matthew

⁶ NIV Life Application Bible note Acts 1:8



Read Acts 1:1-11 and answer the following questions.

What instruction does he give the disciples in verse 4?

What is the gift of the Father?

What kind of kingdom are the disciples expecting Jesus to restore as mentioned in 6?

How does Jesus respond to their question?



How does Jesus' answer in verse 7-8 answer and allude to the sort of kingdom he is building immediately? What mission does this speak to?

Describe how Jesus ascended into heaven.

What do the angelic men tell them of Jesus return? Read Matthew 24:30, how does Jesus describe his return?

According to verse 12 where does this event take place?

While most of the time Jesus' responses to questions of a restored Israel were in response to the misguided belief that he was coming to restore a temporal kingdom much like David or Moses, he had addressed the concept that at some *future* time there would be a restored *earthly* kingdom (cf. Matt. 19:28; Luke 19:11-27; 22:28-30).⁷ The discussion here in Acts is regarding that future earthly kingdom. It is hard to know if the disciples clearly understood the distinction as we see them anticipating its renewal led by Jesus in the immediate time frame. Jesus' answer to their inquiry addresses *the timing* of such an event. The disciples ask "Lord, are you *at this time* going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" (v. 5, emphasis added.) Jesus' reply has to do with the Father's timing. He neither rebukes the disciples nor denies the coming of the kingdom because it will surely come in the fullness of time. Until then, it is the responsibility of the disciples to bear witness to the coming of the Kingdom of God (both the present spiritual kingdom, as well as the eventual, earthly, restored New Jerusalem described in Revelation 21) by sharing the gospel with all people - first in Jerusalem, then moving out to all Judea and Samaria, and eventually to the ends of the earth. This will happen in both the immediate future as the apostles go out and share the gospel to the known world, and also in the long range future today where we are still are called to go

⁷ Bible Knowledge Commentary

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forth and share the gospel with all peoples in all places. Evangelism is a required aspect of living as a disciple of Christ, and we are prepared and empowered to do so as we discussed in our previous passage.

As the disciples were staring off into the heavens after the departed Jesus, two angelic men address them and draw their attention away from the heavens down to earth. They affirmed the reality that Jesus would one day return, but until then their focus was before them in the final instructions of Jesus to bring the Gospel to the nations.

Verse 12 tells us that the ascension took place at the Mount of Olives, as did so many crucial events in the life of Jesus. He retired there often with his disciples when they were in Jerusalem for festival holidays (Luke 21:37). He taught the Twelve disciples in that location away from the throngs of crowds (The Olivet Discourse of Matthew 24, 25). He descended from the Mount of Olives as he made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Matthew 21:1). And to that mount he retired after the Passover to pray in the garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:39). Zechariah (11:23) and Ezekiel (43:1-4) both prophesy that the Messiah will return again to the Mount of Olives on the Day of the Lord. Just as the angelic men (of Acts 1:11) affirm, on that day he will come again as the disciples saw him depart: bodily, on the clouds of heaven, and in view of people (Revelation 1:7).

Personal Reflection:

As you reflect back over our study, consider our over-arching theme of *“Who do you say I am?”* We have followed Jesus through his ministry, through Passion Week, and rejoiced upon his resurrection. We too were present, by means of this study, to receive the command to go forth and make disciples of the nations. The question posed in the title of our study prompts us to thoughtfully prepare an answer for our faith in Jesus as not only our Savior and Redeemer, but also as the Divine incarnation, the Son of God. What answers have you found through the process of this study over the last ten weeks? In his first epistle Peter enjoins us to *“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have”* (1Peter 3:15). Reflect carefully upon Peter’s command and frame your response to it. Taking the time now to answer this command will prepare you in advance when you are called upon by someone earnestly seeking to know the truth about God. In so doing you will be able to fulfill Jesus’ call to be a disciple leading the lost sheep back to the Shepherd.

My Faith-filled Companions,

Thank you for taking the time (and it was a significant amount of time!) to pursue this study with me. If it wasn't for you I wouldn't have pursued God's word as diligently as I have. You have been my motivation and encouragement all these weeks of study and preparation. God's calling on my heart is loud and clear that I am to share his Word with you, and to lead you into a deeper, more meaningful and personal relationship with his blessed Son, Jesus. In doing the work he has set before me to do on your behalf, he has blessed me richly in your friendship, prayers, and insights. Thank you for bringing me joy every day. I hope you will join me again in another study in the Word of God.

God's blessings upon you as you pursue his Word!

Elizabeth