

IS THERE A BEATING HEART? MATTHEW 28:18-20

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Michael Brady was a stuntman for Universal Studios. He specialized in skydiving. Michael was in Benson, Arizona, preparing for a stunt in which he'd parachute onto the top of a moving train. Climbing up the ladder on the side of the train to check some rigging, Michael accidentally fell, hitting his head and dying instantly. Michael's body was taken to the University Medical Center in Tucson. His heart was placed inside the body of another man – Bill Wohl, who had been kept alive for the previous 159 days by a temporary artificial heart.

The identities of organ donors used to be kept secret from the recipients. Now, after a waiting period, donor networks will facilitate contact between heart transplant patients and surviving family members. So, six months and one day after getting a new heart, Bill Wohl received a letter from Michael Brady's family with a picture of Michael enclosed. Bill was surprised to find that he had the heart of a 36-year-old Hollywood stuntman.

He said, "I looked at this picture – at this incredibly good-looking, super-fit, super athletic guy – and I thought, are you kidding me? That's whose heart I've got?" Before his heart transplant, Bill Wohl had been a Type-A, overweight, money-obsessed businessman pursuing a jet-setter lifestyle. Today, he works part time, spending most of his new-found energy winning speed and performance medals in swimming, cycling and track.

Recently interviewed by a reporter in his Scottsdale condo, Bill Wohl leaned forward in his chair, glanced up at the bronze, silver, and gold medals he has won, lowered his voice and wondered out loud what has changed him so much. Then Bill said: "Every day, all day, I thank God for Michael Brady. When I ride, when I work out . . . the biggest thing is to honor him."¹

A new heart changed him. I ask you: Is there a beating heart? Is there a beating heart? Is the heart of Jesus Christ beating in you? When the heart of Jesus beats in your

¹Adapted from David Leibowitz, "Change of Heart," in *Phoenix Magazine*, phoenixmag.com/lifestyle/valley-news/200909/change-of-heart (accessed October 22, 2009).

chest, the biggest thing in your life will be to honor Him. When the heart of Jesus beats in your chest, you'll have the same passion for evangelism that He has.

In Matthew 28, we find the Lord Jesus and His disciples on a mountain in Galilee. Throughout Scripture, mountains were places where God revealed Himself to men and women. In Matthew's Gospel, we learn that Jesus conquered the Devil's third temptation up on a mountain, that Jesus preached the greatest sermon ever preached from up on a mountain, that the Lord lingered in prayer by Himself up on a mountain, that He revealed His glory to Peter, James, and John up on a mountain, that He unfolded the endtimes to His disciples up on a mountain.

It's no surprise, then, that – after His death upon the cross and His resurrection from the grave, and before His ascension back to the golden throne room of glory – the Lord Jesus issued the Great Commission from up on a mountain. We don't know the name of this mountain. But we might call it *Heartbeat Mountain*, since the Lord revealed His heart so clearly there. Listen to His Words:

And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen. (Matthew 28:18-20)

Is there a beating heart? Is the heart of Jesus beating in your chest? If it is, then His Great Commission will be your great obsession. Did you notice that some form of the word "all" appears four times in the words of Jesus? First, "all authority." Next, "all nations." Third, "all things." And finally, "always." I invite you to consider with me what some have called the four universals of the Great Commission.

I. "ALL AUTHORITY" – THE POWER FOR OUR MISSION

Read the words of Jesus in verse 18 and the beginning of verse 19: "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore . . ." The power for our mission is His authority. The word translated "authority" here is the Greek term *exousia*. It means to have permission. The word can also be translated "power" or "right." It means the right and the power to make something happen.

Throughout His ministry, the issue of the Lord's authority kept coming up. When the Lord taught, the people were astonished, because He taught as one having authority (Matthew 7:28-29). He had the right to teach new and original revelation from God directly to them, because He is God. When four men lowered their crippled friend through the roof into the presence of the Lord Jesus, He forgave the man's sin and healed the man's body because He has the authority to heal and forgive, and "when the multitudes saw it, they marveled and glorified God, who had given such power (or authority) to men" (Matthew 9:6-8).

When He sent His disciples out in His name, "He gave them power (or authority) over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease" (Matthew 10:1). He could delegate His authority, because it was *His* authority. One

day the religious leaders came to Jesus and asked Him, “By what authority are you doing these things? And who gave You this authority?” (Matthew 21:23). And Jesus basically said, “I’m not going to tell you.” Do you know why He didn’t have to tell them? Because He had authority!

When the time came for Jesus to go to the cross, He made it clear that He was still exercising His authority. He said: “Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have the power (or authority) to lay it down, and I have the power (or authority) to take it again” (John 10:17-18). The Romans did not take His life. The Jews did not take His life. The Devil did not take His life. The Lord Jesus laid down His life willingly. His death was an act of authority.

One day, He will judge all of humanity and all of history by His authority. He said: “Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man” (John 5:25-27). Every person on planet earth has an appointment with Jesus. You can reject Him now. You can ignore Him now. You can curse Him now. You can ridicule Him now. But, one day, you will stand before Him, and He will judge you by His authority. He had and has and always will have authority as the only begotten Son of God.

Notice the extent of His authority. He says, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.” The word authority carries with it the idea of jurisdiction. Jesus wanted His disciples to understand how far His jurisdiction went. It went up to the highest heights of heaven – *all authority has been given to Me in Heaven*. His authority also reached across the oceans and continents and scaled mountains and plumbed the depths of every square inch of planet earth – *all authority has been given to Me . . . on earth*. In other words, Jesus was saying, there are no boundaries to His authority.

When I was about 10 or 11 years old, I had a standing appointment every week to watch Bo and Luke Duke on television. If you’re brave enough to admit you remember that show, you know that Bo and Luke were always being chased “in hot pursuit” by Sheriff Roscoe P. Coltrane. He’d come after them in his patrol car. They’d try to outrun him in their stock car. And Bo and Luke always had the same destination – the Hazzard County line. They’d drive hard, they’d go airborne a couple of times, and finally, they’d cross the county line, pull over, get out of their car, and Roscoe would ride up to the county line and get out of the patrol car and stop. And he’d be so frustrated that he couldn’t stand it. He couldn’t arrest them. He couldn’t keep chasing them. There was nothing he could do. Why? They were out of his jurisdiction.

No part of this universe exceeds the jurisdiction of the Lord Jesus. His authority reaches across every line – every cultural line, every institutional line, every organizational line, every social line, every racial line, every ethnic line, every political line, every geographical line, every linguistic line, every attitudinal line, every religious line, every ancestral line, every financial line, every educational line, and every spiritual line. No one and no territory is beyond His reach. His authority extends beyond the ends of the earth.

And His authority is the power for our mission. No barrier and no boundary can thwart His authority – or ours when we go in His name. When we go in His name, we can say boldly, *Nothing can stand against me*. For nothing can stand against Him! His authority extends everywhere. His authority overcomes everything. And, church, we have His authority. Our challenge is to go and exercise that authority to win souls for Jesus Christ.

Is there a beating heart? Is there a beating heart? Is the heart of Jesus Christ beating in you to go in His power?

This brings us to the next universal in the Great Commission: “all nations.”

II. “ALL NATIONS” – THE PEOPLE OF OUR MISSION

Matthew 28:19 gets at the heart of the Great Commission. Based on the authority Jesus has given us, He commands: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations” (Matthew 28:19). You may have heard before that this verse contains only one command in the original language of Scripture: “Make disciples of all the nations.” Every other part of the verse relates back to that command. It’s surprising. “Go” is not the main command. “Baptize” is not the main command. “Teach,” in verse 20, is not the main command. All of those words support the main command.

The main command is “make disciples of all the nations.” From all the nations, from every type of person on planet earth, go make disciples. A disciple is a follower. A disciple is someone who is instructed and trained by the master. The goal is to find people who are not following Jesus Christ, to tell them the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ, and then to encourage them to become passionate followers of Jesus Christ.

Some preachers and teachers have made the mistake, however, of saying that, since the verb “go” is a participle in the original language, that what Jesus meant was “as you go,” or “while you are going,” or “since you are going,” make disciples. That’s not the way Jesus should be understood. “Go” carries the force of a strong command in this sentence.

If you’ll look in your Bible in Matthew 2:13, you’ll find that Matthew uses a similar construction in that verse. He writes: “Behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, “Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt” (Matthew 2:13). Here, the word “arise” is a participle. But it would be ridiculous to think that the angel was telling Joseph, “Joseph, since you’re getting up anyway, take the Child and flee to Egypt.” No, the angel spoke with urgency. There was danger. Action had to be taken.

In the same way, Jesus is speaking with urgency when He says: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations.” Jesus loves people so much that He died on the cross for them, and rose from the grave for them, and then He sent you and me to them with His gospel. Do you love people enough to go?

Imagine that you pulled up to your house to discover that your family is being attacked by home invaders. You see what’s happening from the driveway, grab the cell phone, and call 911. The police come to your house with sirens blazing, walk up to the house, and then stand and watch the harm being done. They polish their badges. They

make speeches about the need to help people being attacked. They sing songs about their authority. All the while, your loved ones are suffering, and they refuse to use their power to help. You may say, that scenario would never happen, but it would be an outrage and a crime if it did happen.

Friend, that scenario *does* happen, over and over again, in churches today. How much more outrageous and criminal is it for us as the church of Jesus Christ – empowered with His authority and entrusted with His gospel and indwelt by His Spirit – to sing songs about the power of the cross, and to preach sermons about winning the lost, and to hold meetings dedicated to reaching the world, and yet to allow thousands and even millions of people whom Jesus loves to die and go to Hell?

I thank God for people and churches that are willing to take the risk to go to the nations with the gospel. There are hundreds of creative and inventive ways to go. Home Bible studies, evangelistic dinners, singles meetings, radio and television ministries, short-term mission journeys, long-term mission assignments, prayer breakfasts, men’s retreats, women’s meetings, sportsmen’s dinners, internet sites, athletic gatherings, camps, conferences, music ministries, drama, arts and crafts, free medical clinics, college campus discussion groups, children’s ministries, special needs ministries, divorce recovery, substance abuse programs, neighborhood prayer walking, military ministry, hospital ministry, nursing home ministry, Christian movies, videos, publishing, ministry to different career groups, Christian schools ... the list could go on and on.

I am increasingly convinced that there is practically no *wrong* way to go and make disciples, and absolutely no *right* way *not* to go and make disciples. Let’s get out there and reach people. Millions are plunging into eternity without Christ right now. If we are standing still, we are backing up.

Is there a beating heart? Is there a beating heart? Is the heart of Jesus Christ beating in your chest? His heart beats for lost people, for unreached people, for people hastening each day toward Hell.

As we move from verse 19 into verse 20, we find a third universal in the Great Commission:

III. “ALL THINGS” – THE PROCESS OF OUR MISSION

What’s the process of making disciples? Jesus says the process involves “baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20). Notice the two load-bearing words here: “baptizing” and “teaching.” These words show us that our mission is both an event and a process.

Baptism is an event. It is a picture of the spiritual reality that occurs the moment we trust Jesus as Savior. It signifies our entrance into a relationship with God. The triune Godhead works to save the sinner. God the Father calls believers to salvation. God the Son redeems believers with His own blood. God the Holy Spirit applies salvation to the believer

through Jesus Christ. That's why Jesus commands us to baptize "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

As our bodies are lowered into the baptismal waters, we show that we have died to our old life. As our bodies are raised from the waters, we show that we have come alive to a resurrected life in Christ. Can a person be saved without being baptized? Yes. But should a genuinely born-again person refuse to follow Christ in baptism? Absolutely not. Believer's baptism is a big deal because it portrays the most significant event in our lives – salvation through faith in Jesus.

But Jesus goes beyond the event of baptizing disciples to talk about the process of growing disciples. The church is called to teach disciples "to observe all things that I have commanded you." The discipleship process involves ongoing instruction in the teachings of Jesus. And notice that the Lord Jesus does not give us the luxury of picking and choosing the truths that are most convenient for us to teach and obey. "All things" means that the whole of Scripture – all of which Jesus affirmed and commanded.

In so many areas of our lives, an event only has its fullest meaning if it's followed by a process. A wedding ceremony is an event. It's an event some young ladies dream of from the time they are small girls. More than one young man has proposed marriage to his sweetheart, only to discover that he is just the small, final piece in a puzzle that she's been putting together since she was eight years old. A wedding is an event! But no matter how ornate a wedding is, no matter how gorgeous the flowers and the wedding gowns are, no matter how wonderful the music is, no matter how moving the exchange of vows is, it's all for nothing if the husband and wife don't commit themselves to the process of marriage. Too many couples have beautiful weddings followed by ugly marriages.

Marriage is just one example. You can think of others. For instance, getting admitted to your dream college is an event. But unless you go through the process of going to class and studying, you'll never have an education. Going to the gym, paying a fee, and getting a membership card is an event. But the only way to get in shape is to go through the process of exercising. In the same way, in the Christian life, there's an event: leading people to salvation, as signified by baptism. And then there's a process: teaching believers to obey the commands of Christ. They go hand-in-hand.

In a chapel address at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary in March 2009, President Chuck Kelley noted that the greatest growth years for baptisms in Southern Baptist churches occurred between the years 1945 and 1955. In 1945, Southern Baptist churches baptized approximately 257,000 people. In 1955, they baptized 417,000 people – almost doubling the number of baptisms.² Southern Baptists have never experienced that type of growth in baptisms since. In fact, though the United States population has grown

²Chuck Kelley, "The New Methodists: Reflections on the SBC Today" nobts.edu/resources/pdf/President/newmethodistpres.6.pdf (accessed October 21, 2009), 1.

from around 165 million in 1955 to around 308 million in 2009, Southern Baptists baptized only a little over 342,000 people in 2008, around 75,000 fewer than in 1955.³

What happened? Dr. Kelley gave this assessment: “In the era of our greatest evangelistic growth, typical SBC churches had more discipleship activities than evangelistic activities. Aggressive evangelism was matched by aggressive discipleship.”⁴ In other words, Baptists of yesteryear were blessed and anointed of God in their evangelism efforts because they were committed to teaching and learning and obeying “all things” that Jesus commanded. We studied His Word. We walked in His ways. Our hearts began to beat in time with His. As a result, we reached more people with His gospel. *Our current evangelism crisis is ultimately a discipleship failure.* We disobey the Lord Jesus and we dilute the effectiveness of our evangelism if we neglect the process of disciple-making through teaching God’s Word.

Is there a beating heart? Is there a beating heart? Is the heart of Jesus Christ beating in your chest? His heart beats for us to follow Him in discipleship. His heart beats for us to teach our children and to teach new believers and to teach one another how to follow Him.

Jesus said: “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.” He gives us His power – “all authority.” He sends us to lost people – “all the nations.” He calls us to a process – “teaching them to observe all things.” Now, I want to direct your attention to one more universal in the Great Commission.

IV. “ALWAYS” – THE PROMISE OF OUR MISSION

Matthew ends his Gospel with these words of Jesus: “and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’ Amen” (Matthew 28:20). At the beginning of his Gospel, Matthew introduced the Lord Jesus as Immanuel, God with us (Matthew 1:23). Now, he concludes with the Lord’s promise that He would always be with His disciples. Then, Jesus speaks words that reach beyond that mountain in Galilee two thousand years ago, through space and time to where we are right now: “even to the end of the age.” Until the end of time and this world, Jesus promises His presence with us as we share His gospel.

As we go in His name, as we make disciples, as we baptize, as we teach His commandments – Jesus is always with us. “Always” literally means “all the days.” Every day between now and the end of time, Jesus is with us. And nothing can nullify that promise. Nothing can separate us from that promise. It’s not a conditional promise. It’s not a provisional promise. It’s simply a promise. An unbreakable, unshakeable, forever promise. He’s with us.

³Peter Smith, “Southern Baptists fret over decline as annual meeting begins,” *USA Today*, usatoday.com/news/religion/2008-06-10-southern-baptists_N.htm (accessed October 22, 2009).

⁴Chuck Kelley, “The New Methodists,” 9.

Is there a beating heart? Is there a beating heart?

Bill Wohl traveled to see Michael Brady's family, with the strong heart of that young man beating in his chest, invigorating his body, pumping blood to every cell. He met Michael's parents. He learned that their son was a man who loved God and cared about people. Then, he met Michael's brother, Chris.

At their first meeting, Chris brought a stethoscope. He held it in his hands and asked Bill Wohl, "Would you mind? I want to connect with my brother one more time." Bill said, "Of course. Yes." Chris pressed that stethoscope against Bill's chest, and he could hear his brother's beating heart.⁵

I pray that if God were to put His ear upon my chest or your chest, that He would hear the heartbeat of His Son. The heart of Jesus is beating to win the world to faith in Him.

⁵Adapted from Carla McClain, "Some heart recipients report strange changes," in *Arizona Daily Star*, azstarnet.com/sn/related/63240.php (accessed October 22, 2009).