

Text: Matt. 28:11-20

Title: Easter's Mission for the Nations

Time: 3/31/2024 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: America's fight for a free republic governed by the rule of law did not end with victory over Britain in the Revolutionary War. In fact, the Continental Army that won that war decided to hold an unauthorized officers' meeting to plan a military solution to its grievances against Congress for broken promises regarding the wages due those who had fought. The path taken later by the perpetrators of the horrors of the French Revolution lay open to these men at this time.

George Washington knew of their complaints and heard of the planned meeting. He forbade his men from meeting in this way and scheduled an alternative time for him to address their grievances. At that meeting Washington gave a stirring speech that included the following plea: "And let me conjure you, in the name of our common country, as you value your own sacred honor, as you respect the rights of humanity, and as you regard the military and national character of America, to express your utmost horror and detestation of the man who wishes, under any specious pretenses, to overturn the liberties of our country, and who wickedly attempts to open the flood-gates of civil discord and deluge our rising empire in blood."

The plea was not well received, but at the conclusion of his speech Washington opened a letter from Congress addressed to the soldiers, and after beginning to read it with squinted eye he hesitated. Reaching into his pocket he pulled out a pair of reading spectacles that most of his men did not know he owned. After putting them on, he said humbly, "Gentlemen, you will permit me to put on my spectacles, for I have not only grown gray, but almost blind in the service of my country." The men did not hear much of what was read, but they were deeply moved by what they saw. Their spirit of rebellion gave

way to a spirit of patriotism, and self-centered grievances were transformed into love of country once again. The republic was saved, although we know that freedom's battle for the hearts and minds of people certainly still continues on.

Having come to the end of the passion narrative and into the resurrection appearances of our Lord, Matthew writes about a moment in history in which the war for freedom from sin has been won just days earlier by the atoning work of Jesus Christ. But the battle for the hearts and minds of men and women in this age continued. It is not a battle for political ascendancy or the birth of a nation under the rule of law, but a battle for the hearts and minds of the nations under the promise of our Captain to build His Church (Matt. 16:18). It is a battle the Lord has commissioned those He calls His brothers to fight (v. 10), and it is a battle that would determine the fate of those who were not yet His brothers, Matthew's *Gentiles* or *nations* (v. 19).

As the brethren of Christ, believers like you and I are called to be faithful in this mission, and that faithfulness will require that we lay aside our spirit of rebellion and selfish grievances that this cause might be furthered for the glory of our Captain. I want us to see three things about what I have called, "Easter's mission for the nations."

I. Easter's mission for the nations is the battle of truth against lies (vv. 11-15).

Illustration: The history we began with this morning is remembered because of the selflessness of Washington, not because of the selfishness of his officers who were thinking about the need for a military coup. The character of those officers creates a contrast that makes Washington's character shine brighter.

Application: Our passage about this age's Easter mission for the nations contains a contrast like that, because Matthew

recognizes that this mission is a battle against the lies of men. There is a contrast between the lies of men and the charge to spread the truth of the Christ's commands here. We learn four things about the lies of men that compete with Christ's commands for the hearts of men and women in the world today.

1. The lies often come from religious sources (vv. 11-12; *chief priests* and *elders*). Matthew's Gospel has emphasized the danger of the lies of false religion. The most eloquent denial of the bodily resurrection of Christ I ever heard uttered came from the mouth of the pastor of a Lutheran Church I attended once as a boy while visiting my aunt's family in Chicago. We should not be indifferent about the lies of false religion. They are the enemy in the battle for the souls of the nations.

2. The lies are often a lucrative alternative to the truth (v. 12). Goethe and Marlowe made the idea of selling your soul to the devil famous with their story of Dr. Faustus. That is what these soldiers did (v. 15). The priests and elders indicated that they had enough to buy off Pilate too if necessary (v. 14). The lies of men can offer great wealth for the selling of the soul.

3. The lies are often ludicrous. We almost have to chuckle at the nonsense involved in the story they concocted. If the soldiers were asleep, how did they know the body was stolen and that it was the disciples who did it? If they were not asleep, why was the theft not stopped? The lie is simply illogical. The lie that says that a baby in the womb is a mass of tissue is illogical; or that a human being is a homosexual creature; or the lie that we can endure trillion dollar deficits and hundreds of trillions of unfunded liabilities and still give our kids the blessed nation we have today; or the lie that music is amoral. These ideas are simply ludicrous. Yet in spite of that –

4. The lies are effective and widely believed (v. 15). Matthew mentions the effectiveness of the lies of these men in his day,

and we know the effectiveness of the lies of men in our own day. How can this be?

Antony Flew: “A prime cause of our being deceived is, for all of us, always our own desire to be so deceived” (*How To Think Straight*, p. 10). The Lord Jesus: “If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself” (Jn. 7:17). The will to be deceived versus the will to know the truth is the key. The lies of men will be effective with us if we want them to be, and they will not if we want the truth more. We must understand this age’s Easter mission for the nations is a battle of truth against the lie.

II. Easter’s mission for the nations is a battle of faith against doubt (vv. 16-17b).

Illustration: Washington’s men suffered from severe doubt about the prospects of the new nation they had just risked their lives to defend. That is a fascinating mixture of emotion, a kind of contradiction of sorts – to risk your lives for the independence of a nation, but then to threaten it with a military coup because of the difficulty of your circumstances. It is a contradiction, but it is not difficult to understand.

Application: We feel that sense of incongruity as we read those words in v. 17, “but some doubted.” They are with the risen Christ – what do you mean they doubted, Matthew? This is not a reference to doubting Thomas, for the Lord had already reassured his faith prior to these events in Galilee.

So in what sense did some doubt? The key to the answer seems to come from the only other time this particular verb translated *doubt* is used in the New Testament. Matthew uses it in 14:31, where Peter is walking on the water, but then he begins to sink, and after the Lord helps him up and into the boat, He asks Peter, “Why did you *doubt*?” using this word.

Here again, we have this mix of the kind of faith that enabled Peter to walk on the water blended with the kind of hesitation or doubt that made him sink. I believe that we need to recognize that faithfulness in the work of the Lord always involves a battle against doubt. As you sit here today faithful to the call to worship the Lord this morning, you do so with hesitations, with doubts, with fears, with a need for stronger faith and assurance. That is the nature of the battle for the nations; it is a battle against doubt, and the passage mentions three antidotes for this doubt in the life of those commissioned by Christ:

1. Worship is an antidote for doubt (v. 17; note that Christ is God). Notice the word *but*. The verse puts this adversative conjunction between worship and doubt because, where you have one, the other is crowded out. In the battle for the nations, it is the One who deserves our worship that has sent us. When we are faithful in our worship responsibilities, doubts and hesitations have a difficult time surviving. It is when we neglect those responsibilities that the doubts become major obstacles to our effectiveness in the battle for the nations.

2. Christ's authority is an antidote for doubt (v. 18-19a; *power* = authority). We do not have to wonder whether we have a right to speak in the name of Jesus when civil authorities tell us we cannot. We do not have to wonder whether we have a right to knock on someone's door when we suspect that they would rather not be bothered. When speaking for Christ, we have the right, for the One with all authority has sent us. Speaking in obedience to His authority can dissipate doubt in Easter's mission for the souls of the nations.

3. The promise of Christ's abiding presence is an antidote for doubt (v. 20b). There is an emphasis on *I* in that promise - "*I Myself* am with you." This need is not farmed out to someone else. Matthew begins his Gospel by introducing us to a baby called *Emmanuel*, which means *God with us*. And he ends by

remembering the promise that, in spite of His departure, Emmanuel is still with us in the person of His Spirit.

The text specifically says that this presence is ours *always* (literally: *all the days*). Broadus: “Days of strength and of weakness, days of success and of failure, of joy and of sorrow, of youth and of age, days of life and day of death—all the days.”

It also says this presence would last “until the consummation of the age.” In his book *The End of Education*, Neil Postman wrote about man’s need to know where he is going. He says man needs “a story – not any kind of story, but one that tells of origins and envisions a future, a story that constructs ideals, prescribes rules of conduct, provides a source of authority, and above all, gives a sense of continuity and purpose” (5-6).

Humans need such a story because we were created to be a part of the Creator’s true story. Our future is the one He has envisioned. We can win the battle against doubt, because this age in which we battle for souls has a consummation, a goal, a planned-out end, and the One who drew up the plan is with us guiding us safely according to His will to its end. We need not hesitate or doubt in the battle for the souls of the nations.

III. Easter’s mission for the nations must be executed with a God-given strategy (vv. 19-20a; *teach* in v. 19 is different than in v. 20; in v. 19 it is the verbal form of the noun *disciple*, and it means *to make a disciple*).

Illustration: Broadus’s definition of making a disciple: “To disciple a person to Christ is to bring him into the relation of pupil to teacher, ‘taking his [Jesus’s] yoke’ of authoritative instruction ([Matt.] 11:29), accepting what he says as true because he says it, and submitting to his requirements as right because he makes them.”

Application: It is important to understand that the command to make disciples involves more than preaching the gospel or witnessing so men can be saved. Note with me briefly three specific responsibilities Christ mentions that are involved in making the people of nations Christ's disciples:

1. Go. The responsibility to go is assumed (literally: "Going, make disciples"). We all go; as we go we must make disciples. The question is not whether we will go, because we all go every day, but rather what will be the reason we go where we go each day. Will it be to make disciples of Christ? Of course, we do see here the need to reach *the nations* in this way, and in the charge of Acts 1:8, the responsibility to go to the ends of the earth is ours as well. We do need a burden for foreign missions as a local church commissioned to battle for the nations.

2. Baptize. The responsibility to baptize is the starting point of true discipleship. Here we see the importance of understanding that discipleship is not the same thing as salvation. We are saved by faith, but we get on the road of true discipleship, of becoming obedient followers of the Lord who saved us, by way of baptism. This is why baptism is only for saved believers, because discipleship is only for them. We need to encourage believers to be baptized as part of the commission to disciple the nations.

3. Teach. The responsibility to teach is comprehensive – we teach everything, leaving nothing out; we teach by both example and instruction, the goal being obedience to the Lord's commands, which He first commanded us. We teach with the understanding that His commands are designed to fulfill His promise: "I will build My church."

Any idea that says that only Old Testament believers had commands to obey misses the true essence of discipleship. Any idea that tries to make disciples without the local church misses it as well. We are not saved by keeping the Lord's

commandments or by faithfulness to the local church, but obeying those commands in the context of local church faithfulness is how we follow Him as true disciples. We need to encourage one another to that end.

Conclusion: Have you made Easter's mission for the nations your mission? Do you have anyone in your life that the Lord has given you to disciple, to encourage to be baptized, and to teach the commands of Christ? If not, are you willing to ask Him for someone like that? Are you willing to ask another whether you can help him be a disciple of Jesus Christ?

Perhaps your heart responds, "Pastor, I do not think I am ready for that." Well, that is ok; that just means you need someone to do it for you. Will you ask someone, "Can you help disciple me in the commands of Christ?"

We need to be engaged in this battle for the nations, either as one making a disciple or as one being made a disciple. Are you one of these? Have you engaged Easter's mission for the nations?

"A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction—the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*