

## The Six Mountains of Jesus

### Part 6 – The Mountain of Commissioning

#### I. The Scope of the Mountain Text

##### A. Matthew 28: 16-20 - A universal discipling mission

**16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. <sup>17</sup>When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. <sup>18</sup>And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup>Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup>and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’**

1. This passage was carefully structured to embrace Matthew’s theological interests in the nature of Christ, the meaning of the Kingdom community, and the salvation history of God.

#### II. The passage in both in both pre-gospel Christianity (the oral tradition) and in Mark

##### A. Traditional sources are suggested in two places in the passage:

1. The mission and baptism commands
2. The promise of divine assistance

B. Did Matthew link these together, or were they already linked together when Matthew wrote them?

1. Looking at verses 19 and 20, some scholars believe Matthew 28 is a re-working of a pre-gospel post-resurrection commissioning, other versions of which were re-worked in Luke, John, and Mark.

From Luke 24

**Then he said to them, ‘These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.’ Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.’**

From John 20

**When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among**

them and said, 'Peace be with you.' After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'

From Mark 16

Later he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were sitting at the table; and he upbraided them for their lack of faith and stubbornness, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen. And he said to them, 'Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation. The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned.'

2. Other scholars believe a more accurate source for Matthew's passage is reflected in Acts 1: 6-11:

So when they had come together, they asked him, 'Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?' He replied, 'It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.'

a. This passage from Acts suggests that behind Matthew's passage is an early commissioning statement that had three parts: **a declaration of exaltation, a mission and baptismal command, a promise of continuing divine support (Holy Spirit).**

3. It is possible that Matthew just inserted the mountain as a device because it represents a place of revelation in salvation history, but since the other mountains in Matthew are historic to the gospels.

a. The Transfiguration Narrative, which is a prelude of the commissioning event.

b. 2 Peter 1: 16-18

**For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received honor and glory from God the Father when that voice was conveyed to him by the Majestic Glory, saying, 'This is my Son, my Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.' We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, while we were with him on the holy mountain.**

c. Other non-canonical sources (Gnostic, etc) from the oral tradition

5. In spite of all these possibilities, there are three pieces of evidence that prove Matthew's use of the mountain setting as traditional understanding in his final passage:

**"Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them." v.16**

1. Because of the peculiar language used in this passage not common in Matthew it may refer to an earlier, longer account from a pre-gospel source.

2. The reference to the Mt. of Olives in Acts 1: 12 (written by Luke)

**“Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day’s journey away.”** (after Jesus’s commissioning and his ascension)

a. Because Matthew’s mountain scene is set in Galilee, and Luke’s is set in Jerusalem, it could be a single source that they both adopted and placed upon a particular mountain setting to suit their themes. At minimum Acts 1:12 supplies evidence that there was a pre-gospel tradition that had a resurrection appearance on a mountain.

3. Regardless of this speculation, the significance of the mountain setting in the passage is determined largely by the context and theme in Matthew’s gospel.

### **III. The Mountain Setting in Matthew’s Gospel**

A. It is clear that Matthew wishes to conclude his gospel with a mountain scene.

1. It is a **literary device** that binds each of the mountain scenes together in a thematic whole. Determining Matthew’s theological theme that binds these mountains has been suggested in 4 ways.

a. What is the literary form of the passage? The words of the risen Lord fall into three parts: 1) The proclamation of **authority**; 2) the **commissioning** of the disciples; 3) the promise of Jesus’s **abiding presence**. Where did Matthew get it?

b. There are a variety of suggestions of other literary Biblical forms: a hymn of enthronement; a divine utterance; an official decree; a covenant renewal formulation; a divine appearance along the mode of Sinai; a commissioning template; etc.

c. The conclusion of most interpreters is that Matthew’s passage does not fit into any one type of literary classification.

2. The passage is an **identifiable Old Testament presentation**.

a. Daniel 7 is one possibility:

**To him was given dominion and glory and kingship** (enthronement),

**that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him** (universalism).

**His dominion is an everlasting dominion** (eternal) **that shall not pass away,**

**and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed.**

b. While Matthew may have adopted some of Daniel’s language, there are two major differences between Daniel and Matthew’s passage:

1. Matthew does not write about Jesus the handing glory to the disciples, but a mission;

2. The nations are not in servitude to Jesus in Matthew but join the disciples in their work of sharing the good news of the kingdom of God.

c. There are no Old Testament passages that present a unifying theological theme used by Matthew.

3. There is an underlying **view of Christ** that animates Matthew's passage.

a. While exaltation and enthronement clearly play a part in Matthew's presentation of Christ, there is no specific title for Christ provided.

b. However, the title "Son" appears in the Jesus's closing words:

**"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit..."**

We have talked about the Sonship of Jesus that is not only here, but is a title for Christ on the other mountains in Matthew:

**"And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, And those in the boat worshipped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'"**

**"While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!'"**

c. But, while Jesus as the Son is a part of Matthew's presentation of Christ, it is not the binding theme.

4. **Matthew reformulates passages found in the Synoptic gospels** – Mark and Luke.

a. A re-formulation of the commissioning scene found in Mark 3: 13-19

**He went up the mountain and called to him those whom he wanted, and they came to him. And he appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message, and to have authority to cast out demons. So he appointed the twelve:**

**5. While Matthew uses all of these 4 as influences, not one of them are used as a binding theme for the Mountain of Commissioning, which is the climax of his gospel.**

**IV. Looking at the theology of the passage beginning with the theology of the mountain itself and not with the words of Christ.**

A. During the second temple period, the image of the mountain functioned as a site for events related to the return of Israel to the Sonship of God, with Mt. Zion at the center of the theme of restoration.

a. Matthew's closing scene on the mountain of Galilee is a re-formation of this theme, as Jesus inaugurates a new age in which he exercises universal authority and in which the long-anticipated mission to the Gentiles takes place.

1. Matthew 28:18-20 are filled with themes drawn from the theological traditions associated with Mt. Zion.

**. <sup>18</sup>And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup>Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup>and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'**

a. "Authority" is an image of enthronement, which is a major theme in second-temple Judaism, especially as a vision associated with Mt. Zion. Psalm 2 is an example of how this theme emerged in this period. Matthew has this Psalm in view on the Mountain of Temptation and the Mountain of Transfiguration.

**I will tell of the decree of the Lord:**

**He said to me, 'You are my son;**

**today I have begotten you.**

**Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage,**

**and the ends of the earth your possession.**

**You shall break them with a rod of iron,**

**and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.'**

b. In the eighth verse, "Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession" we hear the same idea as in Matthew 28: 18 'All authority in heaven and on earth HAS BEEN GIVEN TO ME. In both passages God is an agent bestowing world-wide sovereignty on God's royal Son. In Psalm 2 this takes place on Zion – God's holy mountain.

c. Revelations 2: 26 shows Christ bestowing that royal authority to believers who have been obedient to the commission Christ has given them:

**To everyone who conquers and continues to do my works to the end, I will give authority over the nations;**

B. Matthew 28: 19-20 bring us to the heart of Matthew's view of the church:

**<sup>19</sup>Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup>and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'**

1. Making disciples is the charter of the church – the Constitution of the community of the Kingdom of God.

2. In Matthew's depictions of the Sermon and the Feeding on the mountaintops the crowds were invited to participate in a model of the eternal fellowship anticipated for the restored people

of God on Mt. Zion, God's holy mountain. In Matthew 28 this view is inclusive of all peoples and all nations for all time.

3. In second-temple Judaism the salvation of the Gentiles was connected in Jewish thought to the restoration of Zion.

4. In Matthew 28 the age in which salvation has been restricted to Israel is brought to an end with Jesus's death, resurrection, and exultation, which inaugurates a new age.

C. There are few other things to consider in Matthew's presentation of Christ in the passage:

1. The emphasis in the passage is not on "going" ...there is no account of the disciples departure from the mountain. The image of the church in the passage is a church which is a mountain-top gathering, with Christ at the center. "Gathering" not "going" is primarily in mind for Matthew.

2. The gathering point for the people of God is not the mountain, but Christ himself. Christ replaces Mt. Zion and the promise for restoration that it represents. The mountain motif in Matthew is the vehicle in which the promises of Zion are realized in Christ.

3. in Matthew 12:6 Christ distinguishes himself from the temple in a significant way:

**I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. But if you had known what this means, "I desire mercy and not sacrifice", you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is lord of the sabbath.'**

4. Only in Matthew do we see the Magi (Gentiles) bringing gifts to Jesus – a theological link to Psalm 72, in which Gentiles bring gifts to the Royal Son, and Psalm 60, where the Gentiles bring gifts to the restored Zion. In Isaiah 60:6 the gifts duplicate Matthew's story:

**A multitude of camels shall cover you,  
the young camels of Midian and Ephah;  
all those from Sheba shall come.  
They shall bring gold and frankincense,  
and shall proclaim the praise of the Lord.**

D. The other element in the passage is the promise of Jesus's abiding presence.

1. The theme of God's abiding presence was an essential part of the covenant with Israel, and was a part of the vision of restoration on Mt. Zion.

2. For Matthew, the exalted Jesus is the gathering point for the people of God, and the locus of God's presence with the people.

V. The Mountain of Commissioning in the context of Matthew's gospel.

A. There are three major themes that run through the mountain scenes and climax in the final passage.

A. Jesus as the Son of God

1. Temptation, Transfiguration, and Commissioning are parts of the Son of God motif.

B. The theme of the Kingdom community – the church.

1. The Mountains of Teaching, Feeding, and Commissioning are about the gathering of the restored community and the Constitution of the Church

C. Salvation history – the Spiritual Age is inaugurated, and will last until the return of Christ to gather his church to him after its mission is complete.

## **VI. The six mountains of Matthew are linked together at a deeper level than is normally understood.**

A. The climax of the mountain theme in Matthew 28 is the affirmation that Christ has made all things new.

1) A new Zion – Christ himself has become the temple mount and the temple, and God has affirmed him as his Son in which all authority is vested.

2) A new spiritual community – Christ is the new Mt. Sinai giving the people of God the law of love

3) A new spiritual age for the people of God, in which Christ will be present to his people through the Holy Spirit.

By the end of Matthew 28, we know Christ has made all things new, as declared later by John's vision in Revelation 21:

**And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.' And the one who was seated on the throne said, 'SEE, I AM MAKING ALL THINGS NEW.'**

