

Reviewing our Job Description; Matthew 28 19-20

By Dallas Willard

Dallas Willard:

Thank you so much not only for those kind words but for the invitation to be here and have a part in your in your life for a few minutes here at Biola it's always, really always a very special treat to just be here and to have fellowship with you, to listen and to absorb who you are and what you're doing as well as to have a chance to speak some of the things that I believe have been given to me to pass on. Uh this morning, the topic that I've taken is reviewing our job description. Matthew 28, 19 through 20 reviewing our job description. Every once in a while we need to do that. Life has a large element of drift in it. And so individually as well as in our institutional connections we occasionally need to sit down and say now what exactly is it we're doing. And even in intimate personal relationships; a marriage, uh parents and children. There really is a need to sit down and say now what exactly is it we're doing. I'm reminded of the story about the lady who man and woman who went to a marriage counselor and after listening to them for a while and speaking with them individually the counselor said to the man you need to tell your wife that you love her. And he said I told her. Think about it. [Laughter] You know sometimes it needs to be done again. Actually those are the kind of men that I was raised among back in south Missouri.

So I have a special affinity for that for that kind of treatment. So let's this morning let's just take our time to look at and reflect and think on Jesus's words which we have given the title

The Great Commission and I will especially want to contemplate the last part of it with you the part which says that we are to teach people to do all things whatsoever Christ commanded. Let's just look at the look at the wording here. Sit before the words and absorb. The 11 disciples (verse 16 of Matthew 28) preceded unto Galilee to the mountain which Jesus had designated a wonderful setting. A final meeting. And here they are out in the open. And Jesus comes to them and it's very interesting context. Some worshiped and some doubted some worshipped and some doubted. And of course it was a context that could evoke both worship and doubt and perhaps that's not a bad characterization of the mixed feelings that we often come before our Lord with. And it's not something I believe we should be condemned about. Rather it is something we should be clear about and thoughtful about and accepting in a way of it as a basis for going on into a kind of reality with with Jesus.

Doubts are all right and we just remember we need to remember to doubt her doubts as well as believe our beliefs and if we don't get to living in our doubts the Lord is able to deal with them as we mingle it with worship. See we need to we need to be honest about where we're standing sometimes in our churches we're dealing with folks who are not leading a life of faith troubled by doubt but a life of doubt troubled by faith. And we need to be honest and helpful about this about where we are and these these men where they were living on the edge. This was a ragged time in their lives and Jesus came to them and spoke to them saying no all say has been given to me in heaven and earth. I've been given say over everything in heaven and earth. So now you go and make students of all ethnic groups. You make students of all ethnic groups. Doesn't say Go makes students of everybody but it does say all ethnic groups. And there is I believe a purpose back of this which we can't go into this morning but the important thing is not to make converts of everyone not even to make disciples of everyone but to make disciples.

And I believe that we get the sense of this word disciple if we translate it as apprentices or students. So what Jesus is saying first of all go and make students my students, apprentices to me of all ethnic groups. And I believe it was his intention that method then would grow through each of the groups through those disciples as they in turn made disciples. So make disciples. That's the first part of our job description and I don't know how you understand that. I know that you have some wonderful scholars and Christians here who talk about discipleship. I don't know how you individually have come to think about this but I just want to say I hope that you will have it clearly in mind that we are to make students or disciples of Jesus Christ. That's the first stage in our job description. I can't spend much time on that this morning. But we have to be clear about that.

See, everywhere I go in churches and in institutions what I find is Christians who are dealing with things they shouldn't even be thinking about. For example I go into churches and I find people who are worried about who's mad at whom or who's apt to get mad if we do this or that or the other. I mean there's just so much that shouldn't even have to be dealt with. And it is assumed that this is just going to continue forever. But you see in order to understand that you have to recognize that we have accepted the principle that you can be a Christian without being a disciple. That is an accepted principle in every branch of Christianity that I know of and it's tied in with numerous things especially in our American context. One of the after effects of the old liberal fundamentalist conflict which we are heirs of whether we want it or not is that Christ as teacher has disappeared from the mental horizon of our faith. We don't think of Christ as teacher. The Liberals in one way took him away from us and the fundamentalists in another way took him away from us partly because they were reacting against one another so for each of us I mean

if each of us individually we apply that just by asking ourselves when I get up in the morning do I get up as a student of Jesus Christ.

Now you see where there is no teacher there can be no disciple. So there are many many things that militate against this very idea of making disciples. All I have time to say to you this morning is that's the first part of our job description. I don't know of anywhere that we are told to make church members but usually we settle for that instead of discipleship. So I might not make a disciple. I'll just make a Baptist and you all have probably seen enough of those that you might wonder what I've made when I've made that. So there are deep issues here but I'm just saying what. What's our job description? And I believe that Jesus gave to his people and of course we all played different roles in that but he gave to his people first of all the job of making students to him. Are you a student of Jesus? Is that your identity? Is that what you're calling people to is to be students of Jesus?

Do you present Jesus in such a way that people would say wow I've got to learn from this guy. I've got to learn from him. Or do you present him in such a way that trusting him has nothing to do with learning from him. See that's our first question. The second stage in our job assignment is having made people having brought them to the point where they're disciples and let me just give you this formula for being a disciple and you your your scholars here can I hope straighten out the mess after I'm gone. That's one of the great joys of being a visiting speaker. See to be a disciple of Jesus for me means just this I'm learning from him how to live my life as he would live my life if he were me. When I get someone to become a disciple I must impress up on them by preaching of the gospel by example by every other way by the influence of the Holy Spirit by prayer. I must bring them to the point where they feel that's the most important thing for

them to do in their life is to learn from him how to lead their lives as he would lead their lives. You're life.

So that's making, to me that's what it means to make a disciple. I mean there are other ways of describing that. There are qualifications that need to be entered to be a disciple is not to be perfect it's to be learning. If I'm with, if I'm a disciple Jesus or if I'm a disciple of Mike Wilkins or whoever it is I am with them learning how to be like them in a certain respect. See that's discipleship. So now when you make it disciple you so present Christ that people say this man has it I must trust him. I must trust him. He can care for my sins and he can care for my life. See being a disciple of Jesus is not a matter of learning how to die only it's a matter of learning how to live. And we've got a lot of people who apparently are ready to die who aren't apparently ready to live. We're talking about learning a life which is eternal and leads naturally into a future that goes on forever.

So that's being a disciple now once we make people disciples then we bring them into the reality of God as he lives in the redeemed community. Jesus said if you keep my commandments my father and I will move in with you. Did you know he said that in John 14 we'll just move in with you and John in Matthew 18 you remember he says where two or three are gathered together in my name there am I in their midst. I believe that when Jesus says here in the job description baptizing them in the name of the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit he means to immerse them and surround them in the reality of God. Now of course he means also to baptize them. But there are a lot of people that go under dry and come up wet and they're not any different. And there are a lot of times that we as a community don't have any more to give them. And I believe that our job description is that we would make students of Jesus in the sense I have

described. And then we wouldn't just leave them we would induct them into the reality of the Triune God as He dwells in the church.

So now they're going to be living in the midst of people who are filled with God. That's the basis for the last part of the job description which is; teach them to do everything that I commanded you. Now you have to look at these fellas sitting there on the rock and you have to understand their position. Jesus says to them go to all ethnic groups make students surround them in the reality of the Father Son and Holy Spirit and teach him to do everything I said. And they said yeah lord right. I mean how would you feel if you were sitting there like someone has just gotten beaten to death a team a football team just got beat to death by the weakest team in the league and now the coach says now we're going to go out and whip everybody in the league. Yeah coach. Right. Right on. Let's do it. You see you have to understand that the power here is in Christ and that's why if you leave out that part about surrounding them in the reality of the Triune God, immersing them in the reality of God as He dwells in His people. There is no future for this charge. It's only if we make disciples and surround them in the reality that we can then go on to the last stage where I want to spend most of my time this morning and talk about teaching them to do all things whatsoever I have commanded you.

That part of the job description is what I often call the great omission from the Great Commission because I find really it's hard to find any sign of a serious intent to carry through with it, to actually teach many people even have it rationalized where you can't do that you can't actually teach people to do the things that Jesus said it's too hard. And of course if one doesn't believe that it's possible it's not going to be very high on your agenda because what is impossible you generally don't attempt. So even in approaching this charge you have to believe it's possible. May I ask you this this morning do you believe it is possible to do this? You believe it's possible

to do everything that Jesus taught and it's possible to teach people to do it? Are you with me on that now? In your heart in your heart of hearts you don't need to demonstrate. But I'm really interested in how you feel about this. You know when you believe something that means you're ready to act as if it were true. If you really believe that it's possible that opens a door. Actually we also need to say do we really believe it's a good thing because the heartfelt response to the teachings of Jesus that I find coming from many people both Christians and not is that if you really did what he said it would ruin your life for sure. For example one of the most common responses I have you mean I'm going to love my enemies and bless those that curse me. You mean God wants me to be a doormat. You mean I'm going to give to those that ask me. You mean I'm going to make friends with people who are suing me. You mean I'm going to give up sexual lusting. Why would I live without that?

You see the picture of life that is presented in the teachings of Jesus is based on a vision of the real world of God and the world of human beings is seen from that point of view. We become citizens of a different realm. You know the person who is ready to learn to do the teachings of Jesus is the person who loves his teachings who loves them. To love the law. If you go back and you meditate and some 19 and see how the psalmist is caught up in the love of the law why because of the goodness of the law the goodness of the law. Have you recently found yourself enraptured by contemplating the Ten Commandments? Let's think about it a moment. It may be hard to imagine that because the commandments are often presented as if they were a kind of stick with which God beats us but the vision of faith is the beauty and goodness of the law of God including the old law but especially the commandments of Jesus. So you see when I love Jesus Christ and I see that he is one whom I wish to be the apprentice of in the kingdom of the heavens.

And I understand that faith in him means that I trust him in that way. It's inseparable from wanting to be his disciple, when you trust him in that way then I'm ready to go on. I want to hang on his words see that's when you love someone you as that English phrase we hang on their words. And every time a word comes out of the mouth of Jesus I rush up to to receive it. And so all of his commandments become precious to me not just possible. They're lovely. See we have to have that mental shift before we can begin to appreciate this last phase in our job description. And once we have that then we can move to the level of serious intention to do it to intend to live in the commandments of Christ first because in order to teach them will we not have to learn them first. For example in Luke 12 Jesus says beware of covetousness or aggrieve because a person's life does not consist in the things that they possess. That's that's a teaching for me isn't it.

So now I must learn and I want to learn. Because now I see it as a beautiful glorious teaching of truth. I want to learn how to live free of covetousness or greed. And when I learn that and we'll talk a little bit about the details of how you learn and teach these things in just a little bit but I want to get into that it's very important to think about it. Once I see the beauty of that then I'm ready to tend to learn how to do it. The lack of intention is a very serious kind of thing. I don't know if you're familiar with a book by a man named William Law called serious call to a devout and holy life. If not you might like to just pick up and read the first few pages of it. And in that he talks about living one's whole life to the glory of God. And he starts out with the stunning statement about how people think that when you go to pray you ought to really be devout. No no fooling around. Close your eyes. Get serious. Focus. Concentrate. And he says every reason for being devout when you pray is a reason for being devout in everything you do. But common people try to be devout when they pray and perhaps in all the rest of their lives they do not seriously undertake to be devout in spite of the teachings like Colossians 3:17 whatever

you do in a word or do or deed do all to the glory of God giving thanks to the Father through Christ in spite of the teachings still the rest of our life is often left out of our devotion.

And William says is the reason for this is very simple. It isn't that we can't do it or that it wouldn't be desirable but rather that it doesn't occur to us to intend to do it to intend to be devout in every part of our lives. See the lack of intention is a very serious problem in financial matters in matters of personal relation in all of the areas of life. You and I are built in such a way that our action in our lives is organized around our intentions and the failure to have an intention leaves our lives in shambles. When we see the many problems that we have with learning to obey Christ and living in obedience to Christ we want to remember that most of it is due to a lack of intention to learn how to keep the commandments of Christ.

Now, often we substitute that kind of an intention for sporadic trying. For example if someone curses you and you have time to think about it you may try to bless them. Probably will not be very successful because blessing is not something you can just up and do it except through gritted teeth you know. Bless You Brother blessing is something that has to come from deeper in the self. So if you're not if you're not a blessing person if you are not filled with blessing then in the moment of need it won't be there. That's why the importance has to rest upon teaching training teacher disciple apprentice master. Because we're talking about an enduring relationship in which we learn how to for example to be free of covetousness and greed. Paul often speaks about covetousness. He seems to indicate in Romans 7 that that was the one that really got him. He said if the law had not said do not covet he seems to suggest he might have gotten by. But covetousness got it because his covetousness went into the heart and he also describes a covetous person as an idolater you remember because that person is putting their faith and their love in the wrong place.

So how can we live without covetousness? There is a process that we can learn a process that comes with placing our faith in God, revisioning who we are and where we stand where our well-being lies. It's related to the other teachings of Jesus. Also in Luke 12 in other places about not being anxious for what you will eat or what you will drink see how do you learn not to be anxious. That's a process. And I'd like to illustrate it with just one other passage and that is in Matthew 5 Matthew 5 has a teaching here about anger and disdain and in the manner that is exemplified over and over in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus contrasts the old law which deals primarily with the external action with his law his faith which deals with the heart and he says the old law said you shall not commit murder and whoever commits murder shall be liable to the judgment. And now in a manner that had been done by some others for before Jesus the rabbis the teaching is deepened. It's made deeper Jesus says it is not enough just to not kill people.

You're not right before God and in your heart if you just don't kill people. And here's what he said. Anyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court and whosoever says to his brother Rocca and in this day of equal opportunity it will be sisters as well. But certainly Jesus was conscious that in the rough and tumble of life it is usually men who get into these verbal kind of verbal mistreatment who after his brother Rocca it's hard to translate that term marginally empty headed or good for nothing perhaps. I think a word that I hear used so often is a twit. Or a twerp. Oh he's a twit. I don't even know what a twit is. Maybe it's a bird or something. In any case someone who's totally insignificant or you fool which is even a stronger term. So now Jesus is teaching about attitudes. How can we come to the place where in our dealings with one another in life we are above these expressions of degradation, of anger? How can we move to a new kind of heart? We learned that from him and it goes deeper when you're presenting your offering at the altar in other words in your religious exercises and you remember

that someone has something against you. Go to them and try to work it out. When someone takes you to court make friends quickly with your opponent of the law try to work it out. Maybe give in even if you know you're right.

Well just a few words now about how we might teach someone to do this. The first thing we have to say is you have to understand what Jesus is teaching here about is not some new set of rules by which you can justify yourself as righteous never say fool. Never say twit or twerp or Rocca never get angry. We go on down the list. We see the section dealing with sexual lust where Jesus says If you look upon a person in order to lust after them I think it's very important to observe that translation in order to lust after them you have committed adultery or how do you do that. See in the history of the church we've had people who have tried to observe that by simply not seeing a member of the opposite sex and you go back in the history of aestheticism Christian asceticism you'll see people who were vying with one another for how long it had been since they had even seen a member of the opposite sex. Their mother or their sister. Well certainly if you don't see them you can't look at them to lust after them can you.

You see if you turn these into external rules you miss the whole point because the sources of our action come from our heart. And what has to be changed is the heart. We have to get a heart which does not regard people as twits or twerps it's not enough just to not say it. My grandmother would never allow me to call a playmate a fool but I often thought they were. So the crucial thing is to understand that and that to teach someone to do the things that Jesus commanded. Whether it concerns greed or whether it concerns anxiety over our life or whether it concerns our attitudes towards our fellow men or women that we have to go to the change of the heart. We have to work through the attitudes that would cause us to be contemptuous or angry.

We have to remove the anger from ourselves. We have to remove the lust from ourselves the fear from ourselves.

Now how do we do that? In teaching someone to do this we have to first of all present them with a vision of a world in which there is no cause for anger or anxiety. A world in which we don't live from our lusts. That's the vision of the Gospel. We have to do that. There is no way around that. The vision of God is one in which I am cared for sufficiently so I have no reason to be angry. Now one of the other translations of Matthew 5 or some of the other texts says angry without a cause. But you see what we have to do is to present the gospel that we know there is no cause for being angry. And that can only come from the vision of God's care and sufficiency to us so that even if people hurt us badly we know that we are perfectly safe in his hands. So that's the first part and the second part is simply this we as teachers and preachers ministers friends family Christians who are engaged in carrying out the great commission must lead people through the details of their experiences and help them deal with their responses to Lust to anxiety to agree to a threat.

We have to be with them in such a way that they can observe what is happening and get free from the habits that control their behavior. If someone curses you or spits at you you usually don't have to think out what you're going to do do you. The response is usually immediately there and it's usually the wrong response. So we had to be very careful to lead people through their experience of anxiety lust greed. We have to work in the fine texture of their experience in such a way that they will be able to understand their behavior to have perspective upon it to know when it's coming down the track to recognize the temptation and to diffuse it in ways that are appropriate. Now Grace will accompany us. That's a part of the teaching is how God will meet us in those situations where we're being run over disdained hurt God will be with us. But

we have to do this and in order to do it we will have to lead people into a way of living where they can have perspective on their life before God. The understanding of themselves that will allow them to see clearly the movements of their flesh the movements of the spirit the movements of their world around them and intentionally choose to live in the commandments of Christ. That's going to require a lot of teaching a lot of planning what we call the spiritual disciplines of the disciplines for life and the spirit are a part of that but the most important thing I want to say this morning is simply this. Consider the job description. Observe the role of intention and planning. And each of us individually faces the challenge of whether we live in that job description whether we carry it out whether what we're teaching is a part of us and of learning how we can make it so.

Father will you not please be our special teacher with these words and let the richness of your son dwell in us through his spirit and his instruction in Jesus' name, amen.