



HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

Discipleship Pathway

August 29, 2021

Matthew 28:16-20

Clint Pressley

¹⁶ Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷ And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. ¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ 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, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

(Pastor prays)

This morning we will take a break from Joshua just for a little bit to talk some about discipleship. We'll talk about how Hickory Grove is going to actually pursue discipleship. One of the many things that this pandemic has done is that it has forced churches, and rightly so, to take a long and hopeful look into who we are going to be in the future. Who does she become in the years ahead. We live in a tough world, a mean world, a sinful world, a dark world and as the world gets harder and meaner, and it will, it will mean that Christians will have to get stronger. We have to be sure about who we believe and why we believe that and what it is we believe and how can we live with a solid and joyful faith. And to do that we need a clear path. You're not ever going to just meander up to being a strong Christian. We need a clear path for Hickory Grove. That's my and the Pastors responsibility here. We need a clear path for Hickory Grove as we seek to do what Jesus calls us to do in this passage; in making disciples. Now I am not a creative person. Thankfully you don't have to be very creative. What you can do is you can take the very last thing the Lord Jesus himself says to the disciples before he ascended into heaven. The very last thing he said gives us the template. We know it as the Great Commission. It's the joyful command of being a Christian and growing as a Christian in a hostile world that

rejects who we are and what we believe. Honestly brothers and sisters, I want to spend the next 10 to 15 years of my life leading a church to grow deep even as she grows wide. I want to lead the church to grow strong even as we get sparked in the things of God. I want to lead the church that knows the joy of the Lord even as we live out the mission of God. So that when somebody ask you, members of Hickory Grove, what do you guys do at Hickory Grove? I want you to be able to easily say - this is who we are and this is what we do and here's why we do it. I want us to be found faithful to God's word and fruitful in God's mission. I think this passage, Matthew 28, the Great Commission, actually shows us how to get there. It shows us how me and you can be the church that God has called us to be because...

A Faithful Church Joyfully Makes Faithful Disciples

A faithful church joyfully makes faithful disciples. If you've been coming for anytime you sort of know how we approach the Bible. Today, I will do things a little bit differently. What I want to do this morning is to take the passage and do a brief exposition. So I'm going to start with a brief exposition, get that done and then I want to take our Discipleship Pathway and have a broad application. Let's start with the exposition. I'll try to give you a little bit of an outline. I'll use six phrases or six words just so you can hang some thoughts on them. Here's the first one.

Obedience in hardship

What does a disciple look like? How does it feel to be a disciple? It means we are obedient even in hardship. Now you understand that when we do an exposition of the Bible, you've got to get down into the context. So I need you to just go down the stairwell of 2000 years ago where Jesus is. Join me at the very end of the Gospel of Matthew and the end of Jesus' earthly ministry. When you get there you're going to find some really tough things going on. By the time we pick up the story, for the disciples, it's been a terrible week. Join me in there in the upper room, it's the Last Supper. In there are those close friends and it's the very last time they are together. One of them wanders off, shuts the door and goes out. John says and it was night. After that Last Supper they go down the ravine, cross the brook and go up the hill into the garden. We know it as the garden of Gethsemane. There they prayed together, although some of them slept. In Jesus we get a close picture. There in the garden, all the sins of all of the sinners who will ever be saved are pouring out on Jesus. And he asked, please father, let this cup pass from me yet not my will but yours. While he's praying and the disciples are sleeping

here comes a mob and unbelievably it is led by one of their very own. It's a man named Judas who betrays his friend with a kiss. Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss and there a bit of drama happens. There Peter thumped his chest and pulls his sword and is ready to fight. And Jesus says, that's not how this is gonna go. They carry him away and as brave as Peter was, as he follows at a distance, some of that courage is just seeping out of him. He gets to Caiaphas' house and he could see what's happening. You know the story, Jesus and Peter lock eyes as Peter, for the third time, denies he even knows Jesus. Later, Judas will kill himself. Peter feels like killing himself. It's a terrible thing for the disciples. While that's going on, they take Jesus over to Pilate. We know him as Pontius Pilate. And there he will make some decisions. He tries to wash his hands of the blood but that blood is never gonna come out of those hands. His wife comes to him and she says, don't have anything to do with this man. I've been tormented because of this man. But Pilate feels the pressure from the people and so he hands him over to the soldiers. The soldiers are half drunk and are hating to be there so they take out their frustration beating Jesus, mocking Jesus. They put a crown of thorns on his head and a robe on his back and it's torturous. Once they had enough of that, Pilate makes them take him off to be crucified. Jesus is now depleted, all of his energy is gone, his strength has left, he's been beaten down and he can't carry his own cross. They pull a man out of the crowd, he's there with his two children. It seems like John Mark, who mentions this, knows the boys. Simon of Sirene picks up the cross of their Lord. Jesus is crucified with a thief on either side and they joined in the mockery. One of them later, by the skin of his teeth and the grace of God, becomes a believer hanging on the cross. You can feel the cataclysmic nature of what's happening. It's as if the sun starts to weep and there is darkness for three hours. After the darkness falls there is an earthquake, rocks are split. And I don't know what to do with this next little bit but dead people get up out of their graves and walk. Jesus breathed his last and the temple curtains are torn from top to bottom. A rich man named Joseph gathered up his courage and he went to Pilate to ask for Jesus' body. He takes it to a brand new tomb and closes it up. The Sabbath is kept holy. Matthew 28 picks up the story and Jesus is raised from the dead miraculously. Here is the joy. Here's the hope that we have. Jesus is raised from the dead. The faithful women are there. They're always there. They've come to perform the grim task of anointing the dead body for burial. But, they didn't find a dead body. They found Jesus!

In Matthew 28, they fall down and worship him. And Jesus says, I want you to go, I love the way says it, I want you to go and tell my disciples, who are my brothers and Peter. Go tell them I'll

meet them in Galilee. The disciples have had the worst week of their lives and yet they show up. Being a disciple means we worship even when it's an uncertain future and things have happened that are terrible. A lot of you who are sitting right here have felt that very same thing and yet you come to worship. Some of you know it all too well right now. A disciple worships in hardship.

Go down from verse 16-17 and let me just give you another point of discipleship.

Worship even in doubt

Verse 17 says Jesus comes up to them, they saw him and they recognized him and they worshipped him. But Matthew tells us some of them there were doubting. How many times do we come to worship and we know, we believe we have this trust in God and yet we're wondering, does he even know where I am? We join the ranks of Job who through all of his pains proclaimed, I know my Redeemer lives. Don't forget you need to worship. The disciple worships even in doubt. I'll just take another step down into verse 18. The only phrase I can come up with is this:

Lordship Authority

What a great verse. I love the words in verse 18. ¹⁸ *And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.* Jesus is with his disciples and he says to them, I want you to know, my brothers, all authority in heaven and all the way down into earth, has been given to me. What comforting words for the disciples. What comforting words for me and for you right now. It's good to know Jesus is with universal authority, comprehensive authority, sovereign authority, authority over the pandemic, authority over Afghanistan, authority over Ida. What did Charles Spurgeon say about the sovereignty of God? It is the pillow upon which the child of God rest his head at night giving you perfect peace. Brothers and sisters, you should cling to that.

Come down the page a little bit to verse 19 and there's...

True Discipleship

Verse 19 is where we go with the great commandment or the Great Commission. Verse 19 is when Jesus says now based on the authority that I have in heaven and earth; based on that and not your ability, go and make disciples. There's the command. Look at the scope - go and make disciples of all nations or ethnic groups or all peoples, all kinds of people, everybody you meet. Baptize them! There's conversion. When we talk discipleship we mean people going from death to life, from dead in sin to life in Christ. That's why we baptize them. We believe in doctrine, in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. We believe in teaching verse 20.

²⁰ *teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*” You teach them, discipleship is growing. Teach them to obey everything that I have commanded you, that’s true discipleship. And then just come down through verse 19 and you see the mission. There's a clear mission. Jesus says, “go and make disciples of all nations”. We live in concentric circles. We start in our home and we go to our friends and family. And then we move out to our neighborhood and we go to our workplaces. And then we keep pressing out to the city of Charlotte, North Carolina, the United States of America. We keep pushing out overseas. We are going to make disciples in East Asia, on the African continent. So that circle keeps expanding. That’s the mission.

I'll give you a sixth thought that is...

Genuine Encouragement

It is a beautiful phrase that Jesus says at the very end of verse 20. Before he ascends into heaven, notice what he says. *And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*” Over and over again God proves himself to his people. We trust that he is with us. We trust he has been with Hickory Grove since the very inception in 1955. God is with us and he has used faithful people that are members of Hickory Grove and have been in the past. People that have adorned the gospel with their lives and make disciples. Discipleship is something that Hickory Grove Baptist Church has always taken seriously.

And in our church when we talk about making disciples, we have primarily done that in Sunday school. Now when I start talking about this today, I want you to keep that in mind because we want to keep doing that in the days ahead. So let's take a little breather here and let me give you a brief history of Sunday school in evangelicalism.

We at Hickory Grove did not invent Sunday school. It first shows up at the end of the 18th century, 1790, in London England. In London at that time, there were lots and lots of orphans in the streets playing. It happened because their parents were dying and the kids didn't have any place to go. So, they end up on the streets and they start pickpocketing and committing crimes. In fact, by the early 1800's, thousands of nine year-olds are in prison in London. They're not only in prison, there was a gin craze that came through so they were drunk and in prison. So a few philanthropist decided that the kids needed to learn to read. They started having a school that would meet on Sunday and they were using the Bible as a textbook, teaching children how to read. This school idea caught on and separate churches picked it up because they're the ones that could pull it off. The children would gather and by 1850, 250,000 kids were attending. By 1900, two million people are going to this thing called Sunday school. Americans looked across the Atlantic over to England and we did what we always do, we took something and made it better. So in the 1900s the Methodist and the Baptist picked up Sunday school and it caught like fire. They used it as an outreach. You could join a Sunday school class and not have to join the church. A lot of times the Sunday school classes would have a larger attendance than the worship services of the churches. It became a really useful tool in the 1940s and 50s and then in 1955 when Hickory Grove was founded, Sunday school became the driving engine of this church. We spent the first two years not even really having a pastor and just had Sunday school. There are lots of strings attached to our Sunday school program. You go to a Sunday school class where you are going to study the Bible, you're going to make connections and you're actually going to make friends. You'll have a broad sense of fellowship and a real sense of community. There, in your Sunday school class, you'll have people that are going to take care of you if something happens in your life. If you have to move somewhere, one of the hardest things about leaving Hickory Grove, is leaving Sunday school. So we want to strengthen the Sunday school model because we believe that is a really good way for people to be connected. But, we want to strengthen it by providing a deeper sense of community, a more profound sense of accountability, so that we are connected in one another's lives. We want you to have a forthright discipleship pathway.

Let's talk for a moment about that. A discipleship pathway is just a clear and simple way to understand what we hope every person who joins Hickory Grove will do. So when you are asked, "What does Hickory Grove do to get you involved and help you by way of discipleship?" You will have a clear answer.

We have an idea of what every member of Hickory Grove should do and it starts out with worship. Worship is the most profound thing that we are called to do as believers. We are called to gather together and worship. It is an integral part of being a disciple, to come in this place with brothers and sisters and worship. Today you should have been ministered to, we prayed together, we sing and we lift up the name of Christ as a congregation. God uses that to heal our wounds and to encourage our hearts.

What we do in our service is corporate worship but we believe that every person should be involved in private worship. What I mean is that we have always provided some sort of reading plan and prayer plan so that you, with minimal effort, can get up in the morning, open up a Bible and spend some time with God. This is the way you express yourself and ask God to help. So we have private and corporate worship. Worship is the first real step in discipleship.

But that's not all we do. Let's make it smaller. You'll see the word community groups. For years and years and years that is what we have called Sunday school. But we think a better way to understand what we do at Sunday school, as we gather as a community - Sunday school is a bit of a misnomer because it's not really like school although it does meet on Sunday. But Sunday is not the only day of the week that you talk to the people in that class. We feel that our congregation here at Hickory Grove has out run the name Sunday school. You do one thing here, but in your Sunday school class or community groups, you do something different. There you study the Bible, you can ask questions and you can have a whole team of people pray for you. If something happens in your life and you have a need, that's the group of people that are the ones that are going to help you. So we want to change the name from Sunday school to community groups. Now changing the name of something that's had the same name for so long sometimes takes time. A lot of us are still struggling with the whole main/north to Harris/Mallard Creek change. Half the time, I messed the names up completely.

We know that it takes time to sort out a change in the names. So in the days ahead, you'll hear community groups. And as you hear that, I want you to be thinking about Sunday school. This is the ministry tool of Hickory Grove that will help us in the days ahead.

I'm really excited about what we're doing on Wednesday nights with our new Foundations program, but not everybody will come to that. Everybody can come to worship and community groups, that's really nothing new for us. But I want to take a step deeper. I want you to move

from worship to community groups, which is Sunday school, and take one more step into discipleship groups. We are going to call them D-groups. They will be formed out of our Sunday school classes; people you already know. We'd like to make the groups even smaller, create small discipleship groups with accountability built in. Some of you are already in this kind of thing; accountability groups of three, four, or five. If it gets beyond 6 it's almost like a class again so we want to keep it to about 4 to 6 people. It's gender specific, so men meeting with men and women meeting with women. It's probably finding a better meeting spot and meeting once a week or twice a month. You would be meeting to pray together, to hold one another accountable, to find out what you're reading in the Bible, or possibly going through a theological or devotional book together. This will take some time to develop. I'm just telling you where we hope to go in the days ahead because we think we are building a strong discipleship chain that keeps us anchored. It's so people don't just come in and come to worship and then leave and never actually get connected. Or sometimes you go to a large community group and it's still hard to get connected. We want to keep making it smaller so that we can actually get involved in one another's lives so that you and I are taking care of one another. When you come to worship, you will also be coming to a community group, after having spent some time during the month with someone in a discipleship group. That means there are several links to the chain of discipleship. We are disciples that are making more disciples and that's going somewhere. We are hoping to produce something. We are looking for a product and that product is mission. We thank God that Hickory Grove is always on mission. We are a mission-minded church. Many of you have been on mission trips but we want to retool our idea of missions so that when you hear the word mission you're not thinking about a mission trip. We want you to think about a missional life. We want you to feel like your own home is a little church where it starts. And then that devotion spreads out to the people close to you, your friends or your neighborhood. And from there to your work and the circles just keep expanding out of that, maybe even across the world. Certainly you don't have to go across the world to be on mission. You are going to be on mission from the time you arise in the morning. And as a church, we want to be a church that has a clear pathway. When we have new members join, we want them to see the pathway and have a clear understanding that this is how I can grow as a disciple; this is where I'm headed. At Hickory Grove, our pathway for discipleship is simple. We gather in worship after having worshipped the Lord individually through the week; we come into our community groups in a broad fellowship. It's good to have a group of people you're

connected with that is made stronger because you're part of a smaller group that is praying for one another and is aware of some of the acute needs we have. A group that is holding each other accountable; holding the line for one another, so that we are living our lives actually on mission. We are living our lives to make more disciples.

Why do we have to do this from time to time? Why do we do this? We do this for the glory of God. We want to be a people who glorify God. We do this for the sake of the gospel. You hear me share the gospel every week; that God is holy and created men and women in his image. But we are separated from God by our own sin. God's love is shown to us in Jesus. Jesus Christ, who lived perfectly, died on the cross, and God raised him from the dead and before he ascended into heaven he gave us his Commission. We do this for the sake of the gospel. Look, we have discipleship; we have it for the good of our people. I want you to be resilient and faithful, strong. I want you to feel supported and cared for and helped along the way of being a disciple. I want you to be connected to a body of believers. We do this for the grace of the future. You know we're only stewards here for just a little while. We do this so that Hickory Grove Baptist Church continues the tradition that was laid down for us 66 years ago. We believe that a faithful church joyfully makes faithful disciples.

Now as I laid that out for you, I'd like to close the day before we sing with just a moment of thinking about what we've heard. Would you join me as we pray together, with your heads bowed, where you are, let me just put before you a couple of questions that you should ask yourself individually. Here's the first question. How can you grow as a Christian? What are the steps you need to take? Are you willing to be uncomfortable and take those steps? Will you commit to being a disciple of Jesus at Hickory Grove? There's some of you that need to start the membership process. There's some of you that need to give your life to Christ. There's some of you that need to go ahead and take seriously what it means to actually be a Christian. So this morning, as we sing, think those things through.

Father, thank you. Thank you for a church that loves discipleship and loves the gospel. I pray that you would continue to find us faithful people that love Jesus. Help us disciple them. And God use Hickory Grove in the days ahead.

In Jesus name we pray. Amen.