



Reach Texas OFFERING



All Over Texas: Reaching Everyone, Everywhere

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Study Text: Matthew 28:18-20

Connect:

Share the following statistics about the spiritual condition of Texas:

- ▶ According to current statistics, there are nearly 29 million people in Texas; 19 million, or 65% of the population, do not profess faith in Jesus Christ.
- ▶ Texas is first in the number of Muslims, second in Hindus, and third in Buddhists.
- ▶ According to the 2010 census, Houston is the most diverse city in the United States.
- ▶ Thirty-four percent of residents in Austin speak a language other than English at home.
- ▶ Among the nearly one million residents of El Paso, 98% are lost and/or unchurched.

Ask: What is your reaction to these statistics? What would you say is our responsibility when it comes to reaching Texas with the gospel?

Transition: The lost condition of Texas is undeniable. Across the state, in every large city and small town, there are millions of people who do not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and are ultimately headed for eternal separation from God. Another unquestionable fact is that the lost in Texas are from “every tribe and nation,” representing a diversity of nations and cultures. The world is literally at our doorstep. As we seek to reach Texas for Jesus Christ, we must recognize the immensity of our mission and the complex nature of our task. However, we have the greatest resource available to accomplish our assignment: the mandate of the Lord Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus’ disciples faced a larger mandate as he commissioned them to go into “all the world” and make disciples. His words to the disciples—what we call the Great Commission—provide for us a blueprint for reaching our mission field in Texas as well as the encouragement we need to face the challenges ahead.



Examine:

Write the following verses on the board or on a tear sheet posted on a focal wall or provide a printed copy of Matthew 28:18-20 for each group member. Lead group members in reading these verses aloud in unison.

¹⁸ Jesus came near and said to them, “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. 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 everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

1. We Have Jesus' Authority (Matt 28:18)

Point out three observations pertaining to verse 18:

- ▶ Jesus came “near” to them: The Lord’s personal involvement in this assignment was evident from the beginning. He did not send them a message from heaven. He did not stand above them and deliver a charge from an elevated podium. Jesus approached the disciples to let them see him clearly and hear him distinctly issue the words that would change the direction of their lives forever.
- ▶ Jesus’ ascension would occur soon, and he was delegating his earthly responsibilities to the men he had trained for the past three years. This ceremony would ring hollow, however, if they did not understand the depth of his authority to assign them to the task ahead. Jesus’ authority to give this commission was limitless: “in heaven and on earth.” All of his previous teaching came to a climax here, as they were given marching orders to by the One who was one with the Father, the One whom the Father had given complete authority over all things.
- ▶ The disciples needed to understand Jesus’ authority not only over their lives on earth, but also over all spiritual powers in the heavenly realms. Later, the apostle Paul would echo the presence of unseen forces that seek to thwart our attempts to advance God’s kingdom (Ephesians 6:12). These forces would make themselves known quickly, as the apostles faced opposition and persecution in their mission. His authority was more than sufficient to handle any earthly or spiritual challenge.

Ask: How do you know you have Jesus’ authority to take the gospel to everyone, everywhere?

Ask: How does having Jesus’ authority affect your gospel encounters with people with different faith systems (Islam, Buddhist, Hindu, etc.)?



Illustration:

On Day 2 in the Reach Texas devotional, we read that LifeWay Research has determined that the majority of Protestant churches in the United States are plateaued or declining. Their report revealed that 6 in 10 of churches are facing an uncertain future. "The growth of the gospel in Texas requires healthy, vibrant churches in our cities and towns." Yet, if we look at the beginning of the church in the book of Acts, we see an example of a church that spread and grew like a wildfire on the Texas range. The fuel for this fire was the power and authority of Jesus, as demonstrated by the work of the Holy Spirit. Depending on the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ and his authority will be the means by which we can experience the same growth.

2. We Have a Mission (Matthew 28:19)

Read again verse 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*

Explain that this verse is packed with missional, sociological, and theological significance.

Identify the primary mission of all believers is to "make disciples." Certainly, the mission begins when we "go," but going takes different forms.

Ask: What are the many ways in which we can "go" and share the gospel with lost people?

Follow up with a discussion of their responses, including the following ideas:

- ▶ To "go" means "as you are going," which implies that every disciple of Jesus should take advantage of the opportunities to share Christ with everyone they meet as they go about their daily activities. In addition, "going" could be an intentional action of one who commits to being a part of an evangelism team at church. There are also home missionaries and international missionaries, who dedicate their lives to "going" near and far to reach people with the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Ask: What is a disciple?

Follow up with a discussion of their responses, including the following ideas:

- ▶ "Make disciples" is the main verb in this sentence, indicating that the primary task is to make "followers" of Jesus: people who repent of their sin and follow the Lord in loving obedience. Although the literal meaning of disciple is "learner," the object of discipleship goes much deeper. In Jesus' day, disciples would not only learn from their teacher, but would follow after the teacher and seek to live by his example. In one way, a disciple is one who is saved by faith in Christ; in another way, a disciple is also one who loves and follows Jesus in a lifelong relationship.

Relate to group members that making disciples is a missional call to every follower, or disciple, of Jesus. We become a disciple to make disciples, and the cycle continues for the disciples we make.



Ask: Who is included in “all nations”?

Follow up with a discussion of their responses, including the following ideas:

- ▶ The Greek word for “nations” is *ethne*, which looks and sounds similar to the English word, “ethnic.” To those who first heard Jesus issue this commission, “all nations” were the Gentiles, every ethnic group other than the Jews.
- ▶ This was both a missional and sociological bombshell for these new Christians, who had grown up in a society that was religiously and ethnically exclusive. Although God had always considered his people to be on mission in the world for him, they had chosen not to share their faith outside the community. In addition, the Jewish laws kept them from associating with other ethnic groups (Gentiles) for fear of becoming unclean and stained by their godless behavior. When Jesus commissioned his disciples to go to “all the nations,” he was fulfilling the essence of John 3:16: “For God so loved the world . . .” His followers could no longer hoard their faith or hate their neighbors. They were being sent to be his “witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

Ask: In what ways is this church going to “all nations” with the gospel of Jesus Christ? Evaluate the effectiveness of your church in reaching diverse people groups in your city and in Texas.

Explain to group members that our responsibility to make disciples of all nations includes everyone, everywhere. Texas is a state with a large number of people groups from all over the world. Many of us need to look no further than our neighborhoods to seek those who are lost and far from God; these include people of different races, cultures, and religious backgrounds.

Ask: How does “baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” relate to making disciples?

Follow up with a discussion of their responses, including the following ideas:

- ▶ This phrase in the Great Commission is theologically rich. Jesus’ words imply that lost people become disciples at the moment they place their faith in him. Their decision is then affirmed by baptism, a symbol their identification with Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection and an act of obedience to the example of Christ, who was himself baptized at the outset of his ministry.
- ▶ Jesus’ use of the Trinitarian formula (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is the first and best reference in Scripture to one of the most important Christian theological beliefs. Believing in the unity of the three persons of the Trinity is essential to the Christian faith. One cannot be a true disciple unless he or she believes that God is three in one. This belief can be a stumbling block for witnessing to people of different faiths. For example: Muslims see belief in the Trinity as blasphemous. Like Christians and Jews, Muslims believe there is one God, but they interpret the Christian belief in the Trinity as worshipping three gods.



Illustration:

In Day 5 of the Reach Texas devotional guide, Martin Gonzalez describes the SBTC's People Groups Initiative. This ministry provides "awareness, workshops, training seminars, and practical on field experience for churches who are interested in reaching out the "nations" in Texas. Gonzalez also tells of the People Group Missionaries funded by the SBTC. These state missionaries serve among people groups all over Texas to "mobilize and help equip the local churches . . . connect, love, and share the gospel [with] their foreign-born neighbors, workmates, and classmates."

Urge group members to pray for these programs in Texas and remind them that their tithes and offerings support these vital ministries.

3. We Have a Plan (Matt 28:20)

Read again verse 20: ". . . teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Circle the word "teaching" on the sheet posted on the wall or direct group members to circle the word on their Scripture handout.

Note for group members that the plan for making disciples is simple and difficult at the same time: teach them to obey.

Ask: Jesus' command to "teach" is simple and straightforward, but the goal for teaching—"to obey everything I commanded you"—can be difficult. Why is it such a challenge to teach disciples to obey the commands of Jesus?

Follow up with a discussion of their responses. **Remind** group members that Jesus did not just say "teach them my commands." Knowing his commands is only the first step in the process; however, this is the only step for many people. They understand the goal of discipleship as head knowledge: knowing about Jesus and his commands. Jesus made it clear, though, that knowledge was incomplete without obedience or application. In John 14:15, Jesus tells his disciples, "if you love me, you will keep my commandments." Love for Jesus Christ results in obedience, and obedience is an indicator of our love for him. Full participation in the work of God's kingdom depends on obedience.

Ask: This sounds like an impossible task: to teach all disciples to obey everything Jesus commanded. How can we possibly accomplish this?



After group members respond, draw attention to the last half of verse 20. Jesus promised that he would be with them “always, to the end of the age.” Once again, Jesus expresses a deep theological truth in this promise. All those who are in Christ are indwelt with the Holy Spirit (John 13-17); he provides spiritual power, protection, and provision for every follower of Christ. The seemingly impossible task of worldwide evangelization became a reality as the apostles moved forward in obedience to Christ, taking the message of the gospel to “all nations . . . baptizing . . . and teaching them to obey.” Success was not up to them. Success was guaranteed through the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

Ask: What are some of the challenges we face in attempting to the gospel to everyone, everywhere: including people who do not share our background, ethnicity, culture, or religion?

Ask: How can we overcome these challenges and move forward in obedience to Jesus' command to “go”?

Illustration:

The population of Texas grew by nearly half-a-million people in 2015; in 2018, there was an increase of almost 400,000. Every week, 2,700 people move to the DFW Metroplex area; 1,700 move to Houston; and at least 1,000 people move into the Austin area. With the population of Texas nearing 29 million people, including 19 million who do not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, the importance of the Great Commission looms large. The world is here; the “nations” have come to us. What are we going to do? Reaching Texas is a partnership. The churches of the Southern Baptists of Texas Convention must come together in unity—with one Lord and one mission—to reach everyone, everywhere for glory of God and his kingdom.