

Matthew 28: 16-20: Missionary Challenges in Wesleyan Perspective

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Summary

The pericope of Matthew 28 is the basis of countless research and missionary work. It is a text that points out important dimensions in the perspective of the mission. Yet it was not a text that was substantially part of Wesley's writings (as for example the Sermon on the Mount). However, this text presents challenges that can be read both in Wesleyan and Latin American perspectives. This is our goal. To do so, in delimiting the text starting at 28.16, we started by "inclusion" as a category, considering the sending destined also those who had doubts. From the perspective of "going", "baptizing" and "teaching", we perceive the missionary and soteriological dimensions of daily life, the sacraments and teaching. For Latin America where churches have moved from a missionary perspective focused on conversion, retaking biblical and Wesleyan mission principles in a broader perspective is a challenge.

This article proposes to read the text of Matthew 28: 16-20 from some distinct looks but that are part of the same space. It seeks to read the text from the reality of Latin America, especially from the Wesleyan tradition churches that live in the midst of a great movement of spiritual renewal that can be seen in all the Christian traditions present in this continent. At the same time, he seeks a Wesleyan and Latin American look at the interpretation of a biblical text that has marked the history of the churches. For this reason, this pericope and this gospel present themselves as bearers of novelties to be studied.

1. The Gospel of Matthew - The Assumptions of This Article

Here are some of the assumptions that mark the way we read the gospel of Matthew. They will be indicative for the pericope approach and also for an approximation of gospel reading in a Wesleyan perspective read from Latin America

We begin with an affirmation that will determine the assumptions that we will detail below. The gospel of Matthew presents to today's Christian communities a rich testimony of how the memory of Jesus guided the life of the community of Matthew in the face of the new challenges to faith that arose in Galilee almost two decades after the destruction of the Temple. The teachings and life of Jesus became a guide for the followers of Jesus who were in the community of Matthew.

1.1. Geographical Location: from Syria to Galilee

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By locating the community in Galilee about two decades after the destruction of the temple, we have departed from the proposal of most of the researchers who locate this gospel in Syria. Presenting the Gospel of Matthew as the fruit of Galilee is the result of current research highlighting that Galilee is central to the gospel of Matthew and also that the post-destruction situation of Judaism in the Temple is directly related to the conjuncture mirrored by the gospel.

1.2. The plurality of post-destruction Judaism of the Temple, and the conflict between the various movements in the quest to establish themselves as the true Israel.

Judaism, before the destruction of the temple was marked by a wide diversity of movements. The tension between them was great, but the Temple was the identity of Judaism. With the destruction of the Temple by the Romans, this tension turned into conflict. Each group sought to assert itself as the true Israel. In Galilee, two movements that spoke would mark the gospel of Matthew: the Christian Jews (who produced the gospel) and the Jews of the synagogue (the great adversaries). These movements sought to establish their religious proposal as an alternative of piety; as the way of atonement for sin; as a search for forgiveness and communion with God.

The Christian Jews of Galilee, through the Gospel of Matthew, guided the faithful of the community to live the perspective of the Kingdom according to the life and message of Jesus.

2. The Gospel of Matthew: The Kingdom of God as the centrality of life

The Gospel of Matthew has the literary color of Semitic thought. It stands out in this color, as characteristic of the oral tradition, which seeks to establish structures that facilitate the memorization, the use of concentric structures that can be compared to a sandwich, with multiple layers. The outer parts of the sandwich serve as a frame for the main: the filling. It is not only perceived in several pericopes, but also in the whole of the Gospel. The guiding thread of the organization of the Gospel is the set of five teachings of Jesus. They are found in chapters 5-7; 10; 13; 18; 23-24. This structure is involved by an introduction about the childhood of Jesus and a conclusion with the sending of the disciples. The opening and closure are complemented in the perspective that the foreigners are the ones who recognize the boy who is born (the magicians) and Jesus sends the disciples to all the ethnic groups (sending of chapter 28). Let's see:

Introduction: Mt 1 to 4: reports of childhood with emphasis on foreigners (magicians) recognizing the sovereignty of Jesus

A) Mt 5 to 7 - The Sermon on the Mount

B) Mt 10 - Mission Instructions

C) Mt 13 - Teaching about the Kingdom: The Parables of Jesus

B) Mt 18 - Instructions for life in the community: about forgiveness

A) Mt 24 to 25 - The Eschatological Sermon: The Reward of the Righteous

Conclusion: Matthew 28: 16ff - On the Mount of Galilee

To facilitate understanding, we need to look at the layers together.

The first layer (A-A: Mt 5-7 and Mt 24-25)

This first layer relates the Sermon on the Mount to the Eschatological Sermon. The hill is a significant place for Matthew. In him, the faithful meet God and listen to the word that challenges and transforms life. Therefore, the Sermon on the Mount presents the challenge for the Christian life that begins with the beatitudes which, following the characteristic of the gospel, have a concentric structure. They teach that blessed is one who lives a deep commitment to God and neighbor (in the building of peace). Justice and mercy are central actions in the beatitudes.

In the organization of the Sermon on the Mount, which is also concentric, the Lord's Prayer is central. That is, both the beatitudes and the prayer of the Lord's Prayer represent the expected positions of the followers of Jesus. In the same dimension, the Eschatological Sermon rewards the righteous in presenting the judgment. They are the ones who attended the little one who was hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, imprisoned. The important thing is to highlight that they do this without realizing that they did it (when we saw you hungry ...?). That is, they are those who, through the experience of faith, love, protect and serve the little ones as part of their nature, of their way of being.

The second layer: mission and forgiveness (B-B: Mt 10 and Mt 18)

This layer points to the community of faith. Mission instructions and forgiveness instructions complement each other. The mission causes the disciples to carry words that produce peace in the houses ("if the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it" 10: 13). In order to fulfill this sending, it is necessary the divestiture of the missionary (to take only a cape and a sandal, etc). At the same time, chapter 18 shows that missionary action must produce a community that knows how to forgive. Therefore, while other movements (such as the religious movement of the synagogue Jews) define the legal process to judge and punish those found in sin, the community of Matthew is challenged to experience forgiveness.

In 18: 14-18, we find a text that points the way to dealing with the brother found in sin. The first step is to seek to convince you of your mistake. If he can, his brother has been recovered. Otherwise two or three witnesses should be called. It is not a matter of seeking witnesses to confirm sin, but seeking preachers to try to convince you of sin. If he still does not convince himself, he must be taken to the community. If he still does not convince himself, he should be treated as a tax collector or gentile. That is not to exclude it. It means treating him as the target of the mission. Let us remember that Matthew was a publican who was called by Jesus to follow him. Exclusion is not accepted as an option, since the responsibility of the community is great (for "whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" 18: 18). Missionary action brings new people into the community. This causes conflicts. In this way, the gospel presents mission and

forgiveness as two dimensions of community action: to bring God's forgiveness to those who are outside, to exercise forgiveness toward those who are a part of it.

The center of the gospel: the way of the Kingdom (C: Mt 13)

At the center of the gospel we find teaching about the Kingdom, which brings together all the themes. The Kingdom spreads like a good seed in a good field, but if the field is found in the field, the conduct of the disciples should be mirrored in the divine teaching that is different from human logic. For the farmers, when finding weeds in the middle of the wheat, the correct action would be to pluck everything to start planting again. No farmer leaves the plant and bush to live in the same space. However, in the Kingdom of God it is different: everything is together, and separation happens only in judgment, as described in chapter 25. Exclusion is not the prerogative of the community: it is God's future action.

Another point is that the Kingdom is so valuable that when found, it is like a treasure or a pearl of great value. One must give up everything in order to have it / live it. Thus, the Kingdom of God is a treasure that must be central in life. In finding it, there is the impulse to the mission: seed spread on good ground, and coexistence, which presupposes, even, the coexistence of tares and wheat. We realize, then, that the gospel is well organized and helps the community to guide their lives by having the Kingdom of God as the center. This calls for a new attitude toward relationships with those outside and with those within the community.

Introduction and conclusion: the scope of the Kingdom message

Finally, the accounts of the birth of Jesus and the final chapter of the gospel with the encounter with the resurrected, envelop this structure of the five teachings and complement each other.

In Jesus' childhood we find the violent looking to kill him, and God protecting the little one and his family. Both Jesus and Joseph and Mary are protected. God is present in their lives. Amid this history of violence, strangers (the magi) come to worship Jesus, the message announcing the birth of the Savior (Jesus), is recognized and sought after by other ethnicities.

In the final chapter, Jesus, overcoming the violence that brought about His death by resurrection, calls His disciples to the mountain in Galilee. He sends them to make disciples of all ethnicities. The gospel gains the breadth of the fact that in the daily life of existence, the community must make disciples of all peoples (of all ethnicities).

To this end, Jesus himself promises to be present in the life of each one until the end of the world. God who kept Jesus will keep, through Jesus, the life of the followers. The challenge is to make disciples, meeting the missionary challenge, forming a forgiving community that practices justice, which generates mercy and life.

This is the gospel message that pointed out the challenges to the community living in Galilee in a time of conflict and great challenges to be overcome. The memory of Jesus was a source of guidance for the daily life of this community and a challenge for the

proclamation of the Kingdom of God to all nations. It is in this general context that our text inserts itself and dialogues with it.

3. Matthew 28: 16-20: The Disciples and the Ethnicities

In the Latin American and Brazilian tradition, the text of Matthew 28: 19-20 is known as "the great commission." It is one of the texts that receives special attention and, even though it is not often read, is quoted and reaffirmed in sermons and in If, on the one hand, this is positive, making the biblical text known, on the other hand, ends up determining a meaning and a use for the text that do not allow new approaches.

In this way, the text of the great commission is always linked to the missionary challenge. It is linked to the great missions and generally supports the sermons and publications that challenge Christians to leave the city, the country and move to new frontiers to evangelize. Can the great commission be seen only in this angle? What new approaches does it point us to? This is the challenge of this article. To approach the text of Matthew in the search for new meanings and challenges for the daily life of the Christian life, having the hermeneutical key as the question for discipleship. For this, we need to take a path of examination of the biblical text.

3.1. Delimitation of pericope and topography in Matthew - two challenges to understanding

As the text of Matthew 28: 19-20 is quoted normally isolated from the rest of the chapter, we end up not discussing the delimitation of the pericope. Although many share the text from vs 18, where Jesus' speech begins, we understand that the pericope begins in vv. 16. This verse marks a break with the previous pericope, shifting the space of action (from Jerusalem to Galilee), the characters (from the Jewish authorities to the disciples). By this we can see that the last pericope of the Gospel of Matthew begins in verse 16. What strikes us in this pericope, which is that of Jesus' farewell, is that the scenery is a mountain in Galilee. In Matthew, the topography always appears with an important theological role. Topographical references always play an important complementary role in the transmission of the message.

In this discussion about topography, the importance of mountains is emphasized. The ministry of Jesus begins with the Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5-7) which is given in Galilee. At the end of the sermon (7.28-29) the multitudes marveled at the teaching (ἐξεπλήσσαντο οἱ ὄχλοι ἐπὶ τῇ διδαχῇ αὐτοῦ) of him, for he taught with authority, or literally, as having authority (ὡς ἐξουσίαν ἔχων). Likewise, the last instruction to the disciples takes place on a hill in Galilee ("they were ... for the mount which he commanded") and Jesus claims to have authority (ἐξουσία) and also sends the disciples to teach (teaching - διδάσκοντες). There is a direct relation of topography and themes. However, Matthew's preference for the mountains has a theological reason. In the Jewish tradition, the mount is the place of the manifestation of God. Great shipments and great divine instructions are linked to this privileged space. Matthew, locating these two instructions of Jesus on the mountain, affirms to his community the revelatory

character of the divine instruction to the hearers, that is, these instructions are Jesus' speech that reveals the will of God to the disciples.

With this, we have a pericope that has a special meaning. It is the last instruction of Jesus, it takes place in a space that is understood by tradition as the place where God reveals himself (to instruct and challenge his people), and has its basis in the authority of Jesus. That is, it is a transmission text of authority (from Jesus to the disciples) that takes place in a space of God's challenging manifestation. With this, we realize that the introduction to the commissioning of the disciples is marked by signs of faith of the community. In the Old Testament tradition, no one leaves an encounter with God on a hill without a challenge that radically changes his life. The commissioning of the disciples will transform their lives. This is what is pointed out in verses 19 and 20. Here it is worth noting that "those who doubted" are also imbued with authority and are given the challenge. That is, there is an element of inclusion in this text even among the disciples themselves.

3.2. The Great Commission - A Translation Problem

When we work with the text of Matthew 28: 19-20, he is often called the "great ide", emphasizing the "ide" as a missionary ordinance for the disciples. The problem is that we have 4 main verbs in these verses: the verb to go (vs. 19); the disciple verb (vs. 19); the verb baptize (vs. 19) and the verb to teach (vs. 20). The only verb that appears in the imperative is the verb to disciple, the other verbs appear all in the Greek participle. In this way, the verb to go must be translated into the dynamics of the verb baptize and teach. Let's look at each of these verbs in more detail.

To disciple: This verb (μαθητεύσατε) appears in our Bibles translated as "make disciples" in the phrase "make disciples of all nations" (μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη). This is a correct translation option, but it hides the dynamic and continuous process of discipleship. It gives a staunch impression of missionary action. The action of making disciples may lead to a misunderstanding that the end of the discipleship action occurs in the profession of faith of the one or the one who was the target of the disciple's action. On the other hand, when we translate by disciple (make disciples all nations) this puts the more continuous and permanent character of the action, which has other dimensions that are expressed in the other verbs of these verses. In short, we can say that the great imperative of this commission is to disciple - a continuous and procedural act.

Go, Baptize and Teach: The other three main verbs of these verses appear in the Greek participle. We then have the possible translations as "going"² (πορευθέντες); "Baptizing" (βαπτίζοντες); "Teaching" (διδάσκοντες). The Greek participle can be translated in the form of our participle or as a gerund (which is the form that fits these verbs). One characteristic of the Greek participle is the emphasis on habit, repetition. The use of the Greek participle, therefore, presents the concept of the everydayness of

² Here, we assume that the translation of this verb must be as a participle. Let us not reproduce the whole argument that this participle should be translated as imperative because of the verb that follows.

these verbs. In this way the imperative to disciple is given in the daily life of the going, the baptizing and the teaching.

3.3. Disciple in the dimensions of going, baptizing and teaching

These everyday dimension present challenges that complement each other. The question may be, why these three verbs? We can say that these verbs indicate different dimensions of the daily life of the disciples. Let's look at these dimensions, approaching verbs from what appears last:

Teaching: this is an easily perceived dimension. The dimension of knowledge, of teaching. In the Sermon on the Mount, at its end, we perceive the multitudes marveling at the teaching of Jesus. Teaching is an important dimension of discipleship, it is the continuity of Jesus' own action. Discipleship has an important didactic facet.

Baptizing: in this point the sacramental dimension appears. To baptize is to provide the entrance, reception of those who, being part of all ethnicities, are reached in the action of making disciples by the followers of Jesus.

Going: finally, the verb that is usually translated in the imperative and that we chose to keep the translation in the participle. We leave that verb to the end since it is the verb that has a greater number of pre-interpretations. Those who choose to translate into the imperative usually use this option to justify the action of making disciples as a break with a place and a time: Go! That ends up: leave one place and go to another. When we translate by going, this watertight idea gives way to another conception. The action of making disciples is a constant in the life of the Christian people. What is emphasized, therefore, is the dimension of everyday life. The imperative to disciple is embodied in the dimension of daily life. In the day-to-day, there is the space of action that gives meaning to discipleship. Thus, although the sacramental action - of baptism - and the didactic action of teaching are strongly emphasized, the dynamics of making disciples is inscribed in the daily life of human reality. With this, the imperative to disciple gains a universal scope - after all the target are all ethnicities - and a scope in the life of the people of God, that is why all actions are to disciple.

In this way, making disciples is an integrative action. It integrates the community in all its everyday dynamics. It integrates the participants of the community, making community practices and daily practices equally important in witnessing to the faith and proclaiming the Christ. Finally, it integrates all peoples, inasmuch as each and every one of the most diverse ethnic groups is the object of the witnessing and proclaiming action of Christ, starting from the daily life of the communities of faith and of their participants who are, therefore, challenged to make disciples, going among all people, baptizing and teaching. An action that develops throughout the Christian life.

4. Spiritual renewal and missionary commitment: a reading of Matthew 28: 16-20 in Wesleyan perspective

At this point, we want to approach the biblical reading of the Wesleyan heritage. Here, it is worth locating from where we read this inheritance. The Latin American continent is

marked by the presence of Wesleyan thought in its most different aspects. To the point that the Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal movements have an affinity with Wesleyan thought. At the same time, many Methodist churches and churches of Wesleyan tradition live a time of emphasis on spiritual renewal. This experience of renewal is grounded in the spiritualities markedly common in Pentecostal churches. Thus, if the Pentecostal churches show an appreciation for Wesleyan thought, on the other hand, the Wesleyan Methodist and Wesleyan churches show a great quest to experience the renewed spirituality of the Pentecostals. This has a very large implication in the ecclesiological emphases and practices of Christians in these communities.

A first point to emphasize is that there is a great emphasis not only on personal experience but also on experiencing the gifts of the Spirit. Especially in the experience of an ecstatic liturgy; in the search for personal ecstasy and in the search for the signs of God's blessing in the possession of gifts and goods.

A second point is the loss of the communal dimensions of faith. Social action, caring for those who suffer end up in the background, or seen as a complementary action of more empathic care for empathy for suffering than for struggle for dignity. Education, too. What was a Methodist brand in Latin America loses its emphasis. It becomes something apart from the churches. So the promotion of life loses its deeper perspective of building human dignity as part of the mission or, when it is valued, it is in the perspective of a strategy to attract people to hear the proclamation of the gospel and have an experience with God.

A third point, arising from the second, is the assimilation of communities. A look only within the communities, without perspectives of unity and fraternal coexistence. Also, the public dimension of faith disappears (or appears in the form of gaining space in politics through evangelical politicians).

Finally, a deep desire for numerical growth. Not that the missionary perspective does not have the desire to reach people. The difficulty is that growth becomes the goal and not the consequence of a life aligned with Wesleyan values.

In view of this picture, the biblical reading, in dialogue with the Wesleyan tradition, can present challenges to this Latin American Wesleyan reality.

We assume the concept of mission defined by a Brazilian missiologist, Nicanor Lopes who presents the mission from an indissoluble triad: Social Responsibility, Preaching and Education (Lopes,). From this point of view, the mission brings the emancipation of the human being into his or her mouth, endowing it with dignity so that, in the face of the call of faith, it may have an emancipated response. This aspect points to the challenge of endowing all human beings with a dignity that is based on the equality of all before God.

Here our perimeter opens horizons. First, in terms of the general structure of the gospel, it, in dialogue with the center of the structure - the Kingdom of God, points out the alien, the ethnicities, as the space for the proclamation of the Kingdom. To announce the Kingdom of God to the foreigner, to the other, means to promote the dignity and to announce the equality before God that they possess.

At the same time, the pericope presents the mission as something that strains the cultic spaces and temples. It reaches the daily, it is inserted in the life and the practices of the day to day. They strengthen a spirituality of daily living of faith. With this, the integrative action of the "making disciples" imperative is inserted in the dramas of human daily life, in the midst of a world marked by barriers and an exacerbation of the self to the detriment of the other and challenges the overthrow of the barriers, the proclamation of the other as one who must have his dignity recognized and promoted in all dimensions of human existence and the proclamation of the Kingdom, which is a non-negotiable value.

In the midst of a search for a renewal of faith and of the religious experiences that respond to this world in which we live, the Wesleyan heritage in dialogue with the biblical tradition invites us to experience the spaces of daily life and the encounter with the other as an opportunity for living of inclusive faith. To do this, breaking down walls, fighting for dignity and promoting the other are constitutive elements of Wesleyan being and mission.

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